

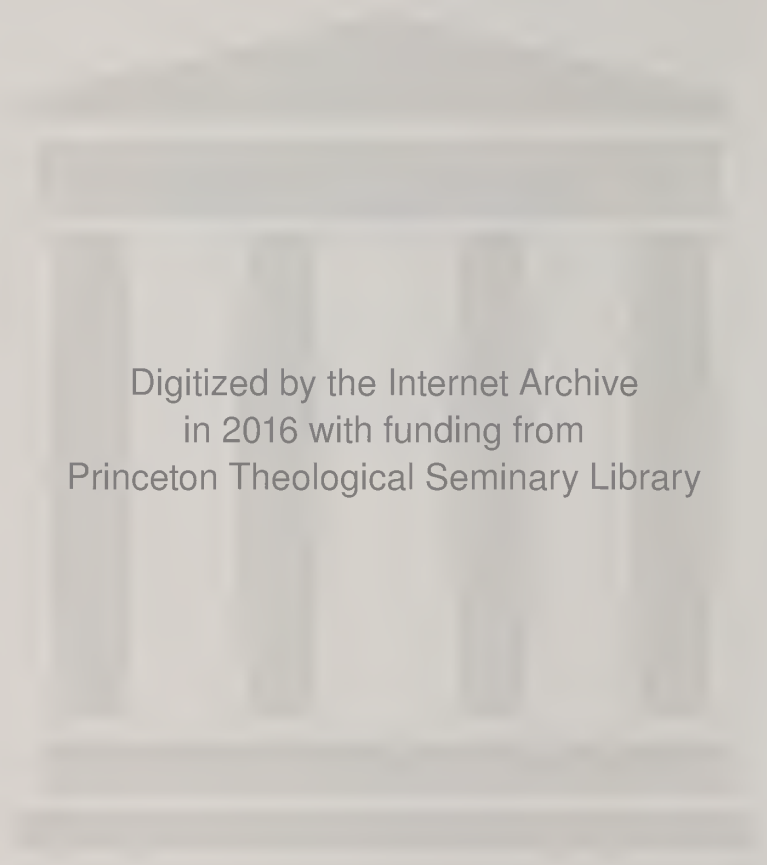


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# THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XXV NUMBER 1 NEW SERIES 2004

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THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

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Stephen D. Crocco, EDITOR

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All correspondence should be addressed to Stephen D. Crocco, Editor, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542-0803; e-mail: [seminary.bulletin@ptsem.edu](mailto:seminary.bulletin@ptsem.edu).

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# Why A Theological Education?

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

*President Thomas W. Gillespie of Princeton Theological Seminary delivered this Convocation Address in Miller Chapel on September 16, 2003.*

UNDER THE AUSPICES of our Office of Vocations, the Seminary annually conducts a series of seminars for prospective students. They come to the campus for several days as our guests, sit in on classes, interact with current students, interview with members of the Department of Student Affairs, and listen to a barrage of speeches by administrators and faculty, including one by the President. My assigned topic for the past two decades has been, "Why a theological education?" At seven or eight times a year that adds up to well over one hundred and fifty versions of my answer to the question. Frankly, I have lived in the hope that one day I would get it right and be rewarded with a new topic. To date, however, no such luck. Perhaps that is because there is no such thing as "getting it right." For although it seems like such a simple question, it actually addresses complex issues that today are widely debated and even controversial. But having lived with the question for twenty years now, I cannot resist the temptation to give it one more try at this convocation on the occasion of the beginning of the Seminary's 192nd academic year.

So why a theological education? Depending upon which key term you emphasize, there are at least three questions in one here. If you ask why a *theological* education, you are asking one question. If you ask why a *theological education*, you are asking a second. If you ask *why* a theological education, you are asking yet a third. Tonight I wish to address the question in all three of its nuances.

## I

First then, why a *theological* education? By asking the question with this emphasis we distinguish this kind of learning from its contemporary academic rival, *religious studies*, and thereby identify it.

Let me explain that by way of an anecdote. The day after the memorial service for Dr. James I. McCord here in Miller Chapel in 1990, I was the pulpit guest of Peter Gomes, the minister of the Memorial Church at Harvard and professor of Christian morals at its divinity school. He introduced me to his congregation that morning in his delightfully clipped New England accent. "Our guest preacher this morning," he announced, "is the

Reverend Dr. Thomas W. Gillespie, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, that great bastion of the Reformed faith." I confess that the word "bastion" caused me to slink down in my chair behind the pulpit and cover my eyes. How often had I already heard this school associated with a "circle the wagons" or "go into laager" mentality? So at lunch after the service, I gently chided my host about his introduction. He looked surprised, and when I mentioned the term "bastion" he said, "I hope you do not think that I was being pejorative. I pray for your school every day of my life, that it will keep its finger in the dike. For if Princeton Seminary goes the way certain divinity schools have gone and others are going, it will be all over for mainline Protestantism in this country."

The full significance of that comment did not register until later when I attended an international meeting akin to our American Academy of Religion held in Melbourne, Australia. There I participated in a workshop led by Dr. Conrad Cherry, at the time professor of religious studies at Indiana. It was a progress report on a research project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, that focused on the history, present state, and future prospects of the relationship between so-called theological studies and religious studies in American academia. It was for me an eye-opener.

Since then the results of that completed project have been published under the title of *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism*.<sup>1</sup> It is a fascinating account of the development of the modern research university in the United States and the role initially assigned to the divinity school within it. Such was the prestige and status of the divinity schools that they piped the tune that set the academic standards for the teaching of religion in higher education, including church-related seminaries. Over time their status in the university began to wane, however, and by the 1960s radical change was in the air. It was aided and abetted by the 1963 Supreme Court decision that teaching *about* religion in state-funded colleges and universities, as distinct from instruction *in* religion, was not in violation of the First Amendment so long as it was, in Dr. Cherry's words, "a non-confessional examination of religious phenomena" (90).

This led to the rapid development of departments of religion in state universities across the land. In a relatively short time there were more faculty teaching in such programs than in Christian colleges and seminaries. It is not fortuitous, therefore, that in 1964 the name for the professional association for teachers of religion was changed from the National Association of Biblical

<sup>1</sup> Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Instructors to the American Academy of Religion, and the journal of the organization, formerly *The Journal of Religion and Bible*, became *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (114).

In 1970 Claude Welch prepared a study for the American Council of Learned Societies on the topic "Graduate Education in Religion." He reported his discernment "of a field to be known as 'Religious Studies'" (88). His report pointed up not only the rapid growth in the study of religion in higher education but "some signs of the changing nature of the study" (89). Conrad Cherry identifies three such distinguishing changes.

The first is the *scope* of religious studies programs. Whereas the divinity schools had historically focused upon theological issues associated with Christianity, the new approach broadened its field of study to include the other world religions, as well as religious phenomena of all kinds. A second change had to do with the *goals* of the study of religion in the university. The Welch report emphasized that the mixing of professional-ministerial and academic-graduate education in the divinity school was "extremely problematic" in such a setting. For it confused two distinctive educational aims, with only academic-graduate education deemed worthy of a secular university. What Welch put his finger on, according to Cherry, was "the emergence of something new out of something old—the birth of a new university discipline out of the womb of theological studies" (90).

More was new than the goals and scope of religious studies, however. Professor Cherry writes that in their concern "to avoid even the suspicion that the academic study of religion was itself a form of religion, religious studies faculty deliberately disassociated their task as scholars from those of the practitioners of religion" (116). They now argued that they were engaged in "an objective, disinterested study of religion, one that entailed no efficacy of a given religious outlook or set of religious values" (117). In fact, they described their academic stance as that of "disinterested objectivity," "personal detachment," "disinterested irreverence," or even "the perspective of the outsider" (117). This signaled their abandonment of a past that assumed that the study of religion in the university should in some fashion be bound up with the Christian faith and modeled on the theological disciplines represented in the divinity schools. That assumption was replaced with the supposition that "the scholar, as scholar, could take a position as an outsider to any specific religious commitment" (117). Put simply, religion could and should be taught only non-confessionally in a university.

What these changes tell us is that, by contrast, theological studies programs are identified as (1) focused upon Christianity, (2) oriented to the vocation of ecclesial ministry, and (3) taught confessionally by faculty who are

personally *engaged* rather than *detached* from their subject matter, whose perspective is that of an *insider* rather than an *outsider*, and who are concerned with *truth* issues rather than mere *description*. None of this is complimentary, of course. It implies second-class citizenship in the world of academe. The knowledge claims of theological studies are dismissed as matters of opinion because they are viewed as tainted by unscientific faith commitments. Likewise, the scholarship of theological studies practitioners is disparaged because it does not meet the academic standard of "objectivity" recognized by the professional guilds which are now dominated by religious studies faculty.

According to Conrad Cherry, this presents theological studies with a serious challenge. In Melbourne he issued a warning to those of us who represented such programs. He observed that the historic divinity schools were even then under increasing pressure from their universities to become religious studies institutions. Should that happen, he predicted, it will put equal pressure upon theological schools to follow suit. And that, he concluded, would be tragic for the church.

I think that is what Peter Gomes was telling me over lunch that Sunday afternoon in Cambridge. He was implying that the difference between theological and religious studies is crucial for the life of the church. And he was voicing the hope that Princeton would ever be a *theological* seminary rather than a school of *religion*.

## II

If a focus upon Christianity, an orientation to Christian vocation, and a confessional stance is what distinguishes theological studies from religious studies programs, then what are the implications of that for the second way of asking our question, why a theological *education*? This question inevitably leads to important pedagogical and curricular matters, of course, but the crucial issue is how the purpose of education is envisioned.

The Supreme Court decision that differentiated between teaching *about* religion and instruction *in* religion suggests two different views of what education is intended to do. David Kelsey devotes two chapters of his book on theological education to this difference, one entitled "Excellence as Paideia" and the other "Excellence as *Wissenschaft* and Professionalism."<sup>2</sup> The first derives from the classical Greek vision of education. The name given to this pedagogical task was *paideia*, meaning "schooling," "culturing," and "character formation" all at once. Its aim was to form in the young the

<sup>2</sup> David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 63-77, 78-100.



virtue (*aretê*) they needed to exercise responsible citizenship. Under later Christian influence, the goal of *paideia* shifted from political to religious interests, Kelsey notes, from the inculcation of virtue to the appropriation of the knowledge of God. This vision predominated in the Christian west in one form or another until the rise of the modern research university.

With the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810 and Johns Hopkins in Baltimore in 1876, the vision of education shifted from *paideia* to *Wissenschaft*. The German term is usually translated as “science” but more properly denotes “critical and disciplined research.”<sup>3</sup> The purpose of research was the creation of knowledge and the purpose of teaching was its transmission to students. This model became normative for higher education and established new standards for what counts as legitimate “inquiry,” “knowledge,” and “understanding.” Among these standards was the minimizing, if not elimination, of the biases of the researcher. Research requires such objectivity, Kelsey observes, because it makes knowledge “public” in the sense of being “accessible to anyone capable of understanding it and open to being researched by anyone who is skeptical of it.”<sup>4</sup> And this is precisely what has led teachers of religion in a university setting to adopt an academic posture of “disinterested objectivity,” or “personal detachment,” or “disinterested irreverence,” or “the perspective of the outsider.” Theological faculty, by contrast, have tended to live schizophrenically in the tension between these different educational models, *paideia* and *Wissenschaft*.

Among those who have attempted to resolve this tension of late is Edward Farley, who addresses the problem in a ground-breaking book entitled *Theologia*—a word he views as “an ecclesial counterpart” to the Greek term *paideia*. Whereas *paideia* sought to inculcate virtue, *theologia* focuses in Anselmian fashion on “faith seeking understanding.” For it is grounded in what Farley calls “a sapiential knowledge engendered by grace and divine self-disclosure.”<sup>5</sup> By that he means that knowledge is given with faith itself, taking the form of a certain *pre-reflective insightfulness* or *belief-ful knowing*.<sup>6</sup> For the sake of “the life of faith in the world,” as he puts it, this embryonic wisdom requires self-conscious development through engagement in critical reflection and inquiry.<sup>7</sup> By this means *theologia* develops into “theological understanding,” a phrase that “names a dimension of the life of faith itself, the

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 153.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

understanding required of faith as it exists in various life contexts.”<sup>8</sup> An education that aims at *theologia*, in other words, enables believers to *think the faith* in order more fully to *live the faith*. Which is to say that there is more going on in theological *education* than the mere transmission of information from the lecture notes of the professor to the notes of the student without passing through the mind of either!

Now it is important to note that this insight, as articulated by Farley, that knowledge is intrinsic to faith, corresponds to Michael Polanyi’s argument that belief is intrinsic to knowledge. In his 1952–53 Gifford Lectures this chemist-turned-philosopher-of-science argued the case that knowledge in general and scientific knowledge in particular is neither objective nor subjective, but *personal*. It entails the *personal participation* of the knower in all acts of understanding without falling into subjectivity and without failing to establish contact with objective reality.<sup>9</sup> By the *personal* Polanyi means that engagement of the knower with the known that entails passion for the truth, commitment to the quest to achieve it, and a fiduciary framework of undemonstrable beliefs that makes the quest possible.<sup>10</sup> Here he cites Augustine’s maxim, “Unless you believe, you shall not understand.” Polanyi explains:

It says, as I understand it, that the process of examining any topic is both an exploration of the topic, and an exegesis of our fundamental beliefs in the light of which we approach it; a dialectical combination of exploration and exegesis. Our fundamental beliefs are continuously reconsidered in the course of such a process, but only within the scope of their own basic premises.<sup>11</sup>

That meets Farley’s requirement that the move from *theologia* to theological understanding be conducted *critically*, but it also protects belief from critique based on criteria extraneous to the subject matter that claim a privileged position uncontaminated by belief.

Now there is good news and bad news in this. The good news is that those of us engaged in theological studies need not live under the shadow of the religious studies claim that our work is tainted by our confessional approach. For if Polanyi is correct, there are beliefs at work in religious studies as well. As Conrad Cherry commented at the workshop in Melbourne, theological studies can claim that it puts its hermeneutical cards face up on the table

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), vii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

while religious studies can be accused of hiding its beliefs in order to protect its claim to scientific objectivity. But if all knowledge is predicated upon undemonstrable beliefs, then the only difference between theological and religious studies is a difference in the beliefs that inform the respective enterprises. That sets us free to develop *theologia* into theological understanding without apology.

The bad news is that a theological *education* can be and often is a painful task precisely because it is so personal. The beginning student can be overwhelmed by the reading lists in the class syllabus, not to mention the sheer magnitude of the pertinent material. The Bible alone keeps some people busy all of their professional lives. And they divide it up into Old and New Testaments, and then they subdivide it further. Old Testament professors specialize in the Pentateuch or the prophets or the wisdom literature. Their New Testament colleagues devote themselves to the Synoptics or Luke-Acts or the Johannine literature or the Pauline corpus. And then there is the history of the church, its life and its thought, that now spans the globe as well as twenty centuries. When I was a student here Professor George Hendry challenged us to go to the library and simply stand in front of the Migne collection. The abbé Migne assembled 379 volumes of Christian theological literature from the first four centuries, 217 of them in Latin and 162 volumes in Greek. I actually did that one day, and I bear witness to you that it is a daunting experience.

My point is that the amount of material is overwhelming and can lead to discouragement and despair if you think you should know it all. I entertained that notion when I was preparing for my doctoral comprehensives. One afternoon I came out of the library at Claremont with a stack of books in my hands that reached my chin. Coming toward me was Dr. James M. Robinson, my principle professor. He took one look at me and began to laugh knowingly. "Oh, Dr. Robinson," I said, "how can you know it all?" He smiled gently and said, "No one ever has." So remember that when you find yourself afflicted by unrealistic expectations. Remember that you are engaged not in becoming a computer but in *theologia*, the development of that wisdom given to you in faith which seeks to understand more fully the blessings and responsibilities of trusting the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with your life.

Beyond the magnitude of the material before us, there is the painful fact that *theologia* does not yield to theological understanding without addressing critical issues that are not extraneous to our Christian fiduciary framework, issues that are difficult to resolve and often tempt us to doubt the wisdom of faith that brought us to this place. I clearly remember leaving Miller Chapel

one spring day following the closing communion service of the semester. One of our second career students was sitting in a back pew with his head in his hands. I asked him if I could be of any help. He looked up with misty eyes and said, "At the conclusion of my first year in seminary I am left with the question of who Jesus is really." "You are at least asking the right question," I replied. "Come back next year and let us help you find the answer." Well, he did and we did and today he is pastoring a large congregation out west. But that was a painful time for him because as a believer in Jesus Christ that was a deeply personal question.

Yet a theological *education* is at the same time a great joy. Someone has said, "The greater the radius of your knowledge, the greater the circumference of your unknown." That is true. But as the radius of the experiential wisdom given to you in faith expands, it demonstrates only that the riches of Christ are indeed "unsearchable" (Eph. 3:8). Frankly, I doubt that our distinguished faculty can explain precisely how your exposure through the curriculum to the variety of disciplines it represents adds up to a unified theological education. But I have heard faculty promise students that it will all come together in the senior year. And I can attest that I have had innumerable seniors say to me with joy in their voices as they approach graduation, "It's all coming together, Dr. Gillespie, it's all coming together." What I take them to mean by that is not that they have at last attained a theoretical grasp of the curriculum. What I hear them saying is that the *theologia* given to them in faith has been expanded and critiqued and enriched. It has all come together *in them*. They have been "in-formed" and thereby "trans-formed." Not alone by the classes they have taken, but equally by their experiences of worship in this chapel and in devotional prayer, alone and with others, and by their exposure to the life of congregations in their field education, as well as by the friendships formed here that will last a lifetime. That is the aim of theological *education*. And yet there is more to it than that.

### III

So we come now to the last way in which our question may be asked, *why* a theological education? Some years ago a faculty colleague began a chapel sermon by inviting us to imagine the following scenario. You are a college senior and you tell an adult friend in your church that you are going to medical school. A likely response would be, "That's great, where?" You are the same college senior and you announce to that same adult friend that you are planning on law school. A likely reply might be, "That's terrific, when?"



You are the same college senior and you tell that same adult friend that you are going to seminary. A likely retort could be, "That's wonderful, why?"

Indeed, why? This is a question of motivation, of course, but it entails also the goal that students pursue through such an education. According to Farley, all believers should pursue the goal of developing their *theologia* into theological understanding. But one does not need to go to seminary in order to achieve that. Seminaries offer an education that develops the *theologia* of students who seek to serve the church in the role of its ordained leadership, meaning primarily as pastors of its congregations. Seminaries were created by churches as professional schools for precisely that purpose. Princeton Theological Seminary exists to prepare people to enter into the practice of ministry.

There is a reticence among many of those who have written on the topic of theological education in recent years to face the fact that seminaries are professional schools intended to educate students for ecclesial ministry. They all address this issue, but with a certain timidity. Everyone agrees that the development of *theologia* should issue in *ethical* practice, but it seems difficult for the authors to include *ministerial* practice within their respective visions. This is obviously a carryover from the judgment of Claude Welch that the mixing of professional-ministerial and academic-graduate education in the divinity school was "extremely problematic" in a university setting because it entails two distinct educational aims. But is that necessarily the case?

Universities hate being characterized as vocational schools, but in point of fact most of the students who attend them do so in order to learn how to do something that will earn them a living upon graduation. Even those who prepare themselves to teach and do research have that as a vocational goal. Moreover, there is no intrinsic conflict between theory and practice. As our late colleague James Loder often noted, "There is nothing more practical than a good theory." That includes the learning and exercise of skills. Michael Polanyi devoted an entire chapter of his book to the role of skills in the development of knowledge.<sup>12</sup> As he puts it in his preface, "I regard knowing as an active comprehension of things known, an action that requires skill."<sup>13</sup> Put simply, there is an epistemological continuum between "knowing" and "knowing how."

That is why the volume on theological education by Joseph Hough and John Cobb is so refreshing. Their thesis is that "church leaders are practical Christian thinkers." This comes at the end of a typological survey of domi-

<sup>12</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 49–65.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

nant images of the Protestant ministry that have changed over time. The list includes the Master (learned minister), replaced by the Revivalist and the Pulpiteer. Then came the Professional, the Builder, the Pastoral Director, the Manager, and the Therapist.<sup>14</sup> Anyone who has served as a pastor recognizes something of each of these types in the actual practice of ministry and that none of them exhausts the task. Hough and Cobb recognize the danger of identifying professional ministry in terms of roles, for there are many and there is no one exhaustive enumeration of them. So they seek a unifying typology that is located more in ministerial identity than in ministerial activity.<sup>15</sup> Their proposal is the worthy image of the minister as Reflective Practitioner or Practical Theologian.

What is missing from their discussion, however, is recognition of the difference between the *theory* of practice and the *art* of practice. It is the difference between knowing educational theory and knowing how to teach, between knowing homiletical theory and knowing how to preach, between knowing administrative theory and knowing how to run a church. The problem for the theological seminary is that sciences can be taught and learned, but arts can only be exemplified and emulated. As Michael Polanyi explains:

An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice.<sup>16</sup>

It is at this point that theological schools are most vulnerable to criticism from the churches. Not only have so few faculty today ever practiced congregational ministry themselves, so few students now come to seminary with a lifelong exposure to the church. We try to make up for both through field education and internships, and these are crucial to our educational program. But it is at this point that the churches must participate even further in the preparation of new generations of pastoral leadership by lovingly and forgivingly allowing fresh ordinands to learn by doing. And seasoned pastors are of critical importance to this "continuing education."

Shortly after I accepted the call of the First Presbyterian Church of Burlingame, I was in the coffee shop of the San Francisco International Airport with a group of ministerial friends. We had gathered to have a conversation with a very respected Presbyterian pastor who was on his way

<sup>14</sup> Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), 1-18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 53.

from a distinguished congregational ministry to a teaching ministry at a prominent seminary. In the course of our discussion, he stated that he was not sure why he was doing this because, as he put it, "we learn ministry from the significant pastors we have known, not from theological seminaries." I remained silent, but I inwardly bristled. My seminary experience had been so positive that I was certain that I had learned ministry here. Throughout the next week, however, I kept revisiting his statement. As I went through the workday, I would ask myself why I believed this was important and where I learned to do it. And to my surprise, I traced every single activity back to the pastors who had influenced my life.

So *why* a theological education? My answer is for the sake of that ministry to which God has called us. Pastoral ministry is not the only form ministry in the church takes today, but the pastorate remains, as Calvin insisted, the first office in the church. It is where the action is. I have been there and done that, and would gladly do it again if given the opportunity. I trust that you who are just beginning your theological education tonight, as well as you middlers and seniors who are on your way to graduation, will experience the continuing development of your *theologia*. My prayer for you is that you will have your horizons expanded, your foundations deepened, and your motivation energized as you study in a *theological* seminary where the focus is on the Christian faith, where scholarship and ministry are both honored, and where faculty and students alike are personally engaged with the triune God, where the perspective is that of an insider, and where the concern is with what the apostle Paul called "the truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:5, 14).

# Disaster, Good News, and a Seminary Education

by JAMES H. MOORHEAD

Matthew 4: 18-25; I Kings 22:1-28

*James H. Moorhead, Mary McIntosh Bridge Professor of American Church History, author of World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925 (1999), and senior editor of the Journal of Presbyterian History, preached this sermon at the opening communion service in Miller Chapel on September 17, 2003.*

There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster.

I Kings 22:8

THE BIBLE AND subsequent tradition generally give King Ahab of Israel a bad press. He marries outside the true faith and sets up an altar and temple to a false god. In one episode, he manages to appear simultaneously as a weakling, a thief, and an accomplice to murder. Wanting the vineyard next to his palace, Ahab offers to buy it from the owner, Naboth, or, if Naboth prefers, to give him even better real estate in exchange. Naboth refuses. Ahab sulks away like a spoiled child unable to have his way, but his wife promises to fulfill his desire for the vineyard. She arranges for two so-called “witnesses” to bring trumped up charges that Naboth has blasphemed God and cursed the king. In what reads like the account of a lynching, Naboth is taken out and stoned to death. When Ahab learns that Naboth is dead, he goes to take possession of the vineyard. In view of a story such as this, it is little wonder that the Book of I Kings introduces the account of the monarch’s reign by saying, “Ahab . . . did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him”(16:30). And this assessment comes only five verses after we have been told that Ahab’s father had done “more evil than all who were before him.” Ahab represents a downward spiral of wickedness among the kings of Israel.

Thus when we get to the prophecy of Micaiah against Ahab—“the Lord has decreed disaster for you”—we readily give our assent that justice is about to be executed. And so it is. In the battle following the prophet’s words, Ahab is struck by an arrow, slowly bleeds to death, and the dogs lick up the blood from the chariot—a grisly but appropriate end to an evil man. (Perhaps it is also an appropriate text for this seventeenth of September—the 141<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the battle of Antietam, the bloodiest single day in American history. See the extra tidbits you get when an historian preaches!)

But what is the fundamental flaw that plunges Ahab toward disaster? I suspect the answer lies in his conversation with his fellow monarch, Jehoshaphat. Before the two kings lead their peoples into battle against Aram, Jehoshaphat wants a go-ahead from the Lord. Will God bless their campaign to recapture Ramoth-gilead? So four hundred prophets are summoned, and they say unanimously, "Go up; for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king." A cautious man, Jehoshaphat asks for a second opinion. "Is there no other prophet of the Lord?" Ahab responds, perhaps through clenched teeth: "There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster." Strong words, these: "I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster." Here is the fatal flaw that brings down Ahab. He wants to hear favorable prophecy and will not listen—or at best will only half listen—to forecasts of disaster. And think of the irony: If Ahab had been willing to hear the negative word, if he had heeded the prediction of disaster and not gone forth to war, he would not have fallen. The warning of disaster—like an early diagnosis of a disease—could have been, if Ahab had taken appropriate action, the basis of his salvation.

But let us not too quickly convert this story into a simple morality play about good guys who pay attention to God's word and bad guys who do not. The narrative is much more complicated than that. The encounter of Ahab and Micaiah demonstrates how difficult it may be to discern the word of the Lord. After all, the initial prophetic vote in favor of going to war against Aram is 401 to 0. Even Micaiah, when first asked, answers, "Go up and triumph." Only after Ahab, unable to believe that Micaiah would really utter a good word about him, presses the question a second time, does the prophet offer another message: "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd." Moreover, the prophet suggests that God has set up Ahab. The four hundred or so prophets who have told the king to go into battle have not consciously told a falsehood. God, says Micaiah, has put a lying spirit in the mouths of those prophets. So don't bother to give them a lie detector test. They'll pass; they are speaking what they believe to be the truth. If Ahab is confused at this point, we can scarcely blame him. Micaiah has told him two different stories, and all the other prophets sincerely believe their prophecy of coming triumph. In other words, the prophetic vote for war now stands at 400 to 1—still an overwhelming consensus and rather good odds. Thus Ahab and Jehoshaphat march forth to battle. Ahab, however, is not one to take chances. He hedges his bets. Just in case Micaiah's second prophecy holds more than a grain of truth, Ahab does not wear his kingly



robes. He goes in disguise so that he'll not make an obvious target for the enemy. In fact, the arrow that fells him is loosed by an archer who hasn't a clue that he is striking the king of Israel.

Despite Ahab's record of moral failing, I find myself strangely in sympathy with him in this instance. He has done, according to the customs of his day, what a king should do prior to going into battle. He has consulted his God through the appropriate channels and has received an overwhelming endorsement of his campaign strategy. He has followed that recommendation, and, for so doing, he has been shafted—literally!

Ahab has done precisely what most of us would do. It is human nature to say—or at least, to think privately—about the one who habitually brings us bad news: “I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster.” Faced with a split decision bringing us both pleasant news and woe, who would not choose to believe the favorable report?

Christians are no more exempt from this temptation than any other people. In fact, when it comes to our basic religious convictions or the way we live them out, we are especially tempted to turn aside from any Micaiah. Most of us do not readily re-examine our own faith and even less are we willing to question whether our practice actually conforms to that faith. Take, for example, the Reformed tradition in which this seminary stands. It is a tradition stressing the limits of our understanding of God except insofar as God comes to us in Jesus Christ. It is a tradition recognizing human limitation and the tendency of even the redeemed to continued arrogance and sin. How well have Reformed Christians truly adhered to those insights and judged themselves by them? This summer in reading the excellent book, *America's God*, by Mark A. Noll of Wheaton College, I was struck by his observation about the Reformed tradition in its early days:

Rarely in the Geneva of John Calvin or Theodore Beza, John Knox's Scotland or the Huguenot fortresses of southern France did Reformed Protestants pause to contemplate the magnitude of their self-appointed tasks. Rarely did the self-denying principles of their own theology check the hubris of the elect. They usually did not act as if they believed what their own theology said about the huge gap between divine omniscience and human finitude, nor did they seem to really believe their own claim that even believers continued to abuse the gifts of God for idolatrous, selfish ends. Rarely were the Reformed as sharp-eyed to catch their own compromises with worldly reasoning as they were to pounce upon the

inconsistencies of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, or rival Reformed communities.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, what Professor Noll has said about the Reformed heritage, of which he counts himself an appreciative adherent, could also be said of other Christian traditions. For the most part, virtually all Christian groups and all individual believers would rather hear the four hundred prophets than the lone Micaiah. Whether we utter the words or not, our hearts usually echo the sentiments of Ahab: "I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster."

Yet one of the major purposes of theological education is to play the role of Micaiah, not of the four hundred prophets. Here at Princeton Seminary we wrestle with fundamental issues of the Christian faith. We struggle with the intricacies of biblical criticism and the question of how the Bible is to be interpreted. We engage theological issues such as revelation, sin, grace, and redemption in all their complexity. We examine the Christian tradition in its historic breadth, learning of church fathers and mothers, of ascetics and reformers, of heretics and saints—many of whose names you have probably never heard before. (And, yes, you really are expected to remember at least some of this stuff. That fact alone may strike many of you as one of the worst of Micaiah's prophecies of disaster!)

Let there be no doubt about it. This investigation can bring pain. When professors or students challenge a long-held belief—as they invariably do in this place—we are faced with a question far deeper than choosing to give up or guard a mere opinion. For many, the issue may seem a matter of whether to surrender or defend the faith once delivered to the saints, whether to maintain or abandon what they understand to be the commitment which brought them to Princeton in the first place. At such times, the temptation is to withdraw into campus enclaves of people who think as we do. We sit at lunch with like-minded students or professors. To the extent possible, we avoid the classes or the company of those teachers—those liberals, those conservatives, those whatever—who challenge our beliefs. In other words, we surround ourselves with the four hundred prophets who will tell us what we want to hear and avoid the Micaiahs who will not speak favorably of our views but only prophesy disaster.

Let us not forget, however, where the path to Ahab's redemption lay. It was the path of hearing—and heeding—the unpleasant word of Micaiah, the very prophet of whom the king said: "I hate him. . ." Do not misunderstand

<sup>1</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 36.

me: I am not suggesting that every lecture, every precept, or every thought that happens to grate against our convictions will be a word from the Lord. Like Ahab, we may have to listen very carefully to discern the correct voice when the prophets are rendering a split decision. Nor is there any guarantee that our discernment will always be perfect. In fact, we may be certain that our insight will sometimes fail. Yet unless we are prepared to take the risk of hearing out those with whom we disagree strongly, we cheat ourselves of one of the most precious contributions that seminary can offer to our spiritual and intellectual formation. In fact, we may miss hearing the Micaiah whom God has sent to us.

We can take this risk—and we must take it—because God has summoned us to a ministry whose full meaning and dimensions we are only beginning to understand. This is true of us all, faculty as well as students. Remember the calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee—the account which we heard again this morning. Jesus gave his disciples little explanation of what they would be about. “Follow me,” he said, “and I will make you fish for people.” That barebones description of the work they were to do scarcely answered all their questions. But they soon knew at least this: Good news was being proclaimed to the multitudes, paralytics were walking, and suffering of every sort was being cured. Quite apart from the disciples’ doing and far beyond their comprehension, something marvelous had come among them. God had brought the kingdom of heaven very near.

The disciples discovered what we, too, must learn: the true source of ministry. It is not we who, by dint of effort or devotion or understanding, create ministry. Rather God makes ministry possible and invites us, frail human instruments that we are, to join us in God’s mission. Frankly, there is a ludicrous element to Christian ministry. God, who could have employed legions of angels or who could have spoken in a voice rending the heavens, has elected to work through feeble human agents. One can scarcely contemplate the fact without smiling, perhaps even laughing. The Lord of Heaven must have a sense of humor.

I believe as firmly as anyone in the tradition of a learned ministry. I would not be at Princeton Seminary if I did not think so. None of what I have said should be taken as an excuse for sloppy thinking or shoddy ministerial practice. Good theology is better than bad, an informed understanding of scripture is preferable to an uncritical use, and good intentions alone will not make up for a lack of pastoral training when one confronts the bereaved.

Yet in the final analysis, it is God in Christ who is the author of ministry. What good news, what a liberating word that is! Assured that the Lord can use our failures as well as our successes, we can be free—free to learn, free to



hear criticism, and free to grow, for we know that the reign of God neither rises nor falls with our labors.

Recognition of this fact will not eliminate the hard labors of seminary study, and it will not remove all of our differences with one another. But we shall no longer work or argue as people believing that the fate of the church and world rests upon our shoulders alone. Emancipated from that dreadful burden, we can with light-heartedness and zest learn from and struggle with all manner of ideas and perspectives. We can even listen to our own personal Micaiahs. For we shall know that all of us—Ahabs and Micaiahs, Jehoshaphats and the four hundred prophets, conservatives or liberals—all of us are sustained by the mysterious grace of God in Christ. That grace is among us today, using us despite our inadequacies, prodding us to increase in wisdom, and always seeking to bind us into the unity of the one body of Christ's church. Knowing these things, may we come once again to the table set by our Lord. Amen.

# Faith, Ethics and the Law

by DICK THORNBURGH

*Dick Thornburgh, former Attorney General of the United States, Governor of Pennsylvania, and Undersecretary-General of the United Nations, author of Where the Evidence Leads: An Autobiography (2003), and husband of Trustee Virginia J. Thornburgh, gave this keynote address at the Seminary's "Faith, Ethics, and the Law" conference on October 14, 2003.*

SPECIAL THANKS for this evening's opportunity to gather together go to my friend, Tom Johnson, a fellow lawyer at the firm of Kirkpatrick & Lockhart LLP, and to my friends, Father Bill Byron and Judge Justin Johnson, and to Peter Suzuki, all of whom were fellow panelists on our "Law and Faith" panel discussion this afternoon. Thanks as well to Tom and Barbara Gillespie, great leaders of this institution, and treasured friends of ours since my wife Ginny first joined the Board of Princeton Theological Seminary six years ago. Finally, thanks to Joyce Tucker and David Wall, leaders of the Center for Continuing Education, for arranging this significant and unique conference on "Faith, Ethics and the Law."

Writing my first and only book, *Where the Evidence Leads*, and seeing it published has been quite an experience. What began as an effort simply to pass on to my four sons and six grandchildren some insight into the opportunities and the experiences with which I have been blessed during my lifetime has turned into a full-blown book. The underlying theme of this book is an expression of gratitude to God, to my family and to a wide variety of individuals and institutions for opportunities I never dreamed I would have. I hope to have offered readers of this book a glimpse behind the scenes in my life as a lawyer, as a governor, as a cabinet member for two presidents, and as undersecretary-general of the United Nations so that they might learn something and gain some insight, from sharing the ups and the downs, the wins and the losses, the pride and the disappointments that inevitably result from a life in public service.

Those of us in public life who have been asked to identify a particularly instructive passage of scripture often identify the passage in Micah, Chapter 6, Verse 8, in which the Lord admonishes us "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." As my good friend Bill Byron noted this afternoon, I am no exception. I agree with the observation that in this single sentence the prophet Micah "sums up centuries of brilliant prophecy." It is as alive and vital today as when it was first written. Rather than simply stating this timeless instruction, however, let me try to put it in the context of the

particular challenges and opportunities of my life as I have dealt with them in my book.

First is the duty "To Do Justice." One might think that for a lawyer this would almost be second nature, by virtue of our training and our experience. But this duty clearly extends beyond the courtroom and the boardroom. It begins in the family, and, for me, with my wife and four sons, where fairness and just treatment were absolute "musts" for a productive upbringing. It extends into the community, where in my early career, together with now Judge Justin Johnson, I became a champion of establishing a public defender's office in every Pennsylvania county for those charged with crimes who couldn't afford a lawyer to defend themselves. We later worked together to ensure that poor persons with other kinds of legal problems could secure lawyers through the publicly-funded Neighborhood Legal Services organization. These efforts were designed to give true meaning to the goal set forth on the façade of our United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.—"Equal Justice Under Law."

As a prosecutor and as a governor, I felt an overriding need to be fair and respectful of the rights and interests of all, and while I am unsure of complete success in those endeavors, I tried to make a good-faith effort to combine the toughness necessary to govern and to maintain public order with a compassion that took into account the distress of people in real need. Let me give you an example. In 1981, Pennsylvania enacted a welfare reform law designed to remove able-bodied employable people from the welfare rolls and use the savings to provide them with job training and placement services and then to increase payments for those unable to work. This was very controversial at the time. The proposal was attacked as inhumane, and I was vilified in many quarters. I responded, "We are not humanitarians when we allow able-bodied men and women to cash welfare checks while the more helpless among us live in fear of starvation and winter cold."

In time, of course, the reforms produced results that placed Pennsylvania second only to Massachusetts in reducing welfare caseloads and moving welfare recipients into jobs. We were also able to increase welfare benefits four times during my eight years in office by a total of more than 25 percent. All but the most strident of our critics were silenced by the obvious justice of these results. Incidentally, these reforms, attacked as radical at the time, look pretty tame compared to the bi-partisan federal legislation signed into law by President Clinton 15 years later in 1996. True and overriding justice must be the end goal of the rule of law under which we live and which is, I still believe, our most valuable export to a world in need.

The second instruction of the prophet Micah is "To Love Kindness," or, if you like the King James Version, "To Love Mercy." This admonition encompasses the highest claim upon those of us in public life—that of assisting others. First and foremost, this requires listening to others, to identify their needs, listening with the heart as well as the head. In my case, this led me into providing such small things as the first day care center in the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.; and urging lawyers within the Department of Justice in both Pittsburgh and Washington to go into the public schools and teach young people about the rule of law and its importance to their lives and their communities.

This obligation extended as well to such important matters as the opportunity to affect the lives of 54,000,000 Americans with physical, mental and sensory disabilities through the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, an opportunity that had a special meaning for me.

In 1960, our family suffered a terrible loss when my first wife was killed in a tragic automobile accident driving home with our three sons after taking me to work. Our infant son, four-month-old Peter, was very seriously injured with multiple skull fractures and extensive brain injuries. After three years as a single parent, God sent me Ginny Judson, a 23-year-old schoolteacher from Boston, Massachusetts, who married me, became a mom to those sons and we then had a fourth son shortly thereafter. Ginny became an advocate first for Peter, then for all Pennsylvanians with mental retardation, and then for all persons around the world with disabilities. Now, I'm proud to say she heads the Religion and Disability Program for the National Organization on Disability in working with congregations around the world to try to make them more welcoming to people with disabilities and to capitalize on the gifts they can bring to those congregations.

You can then see that when President George H. W. Bush asked me to be the point man for his administration, seeing to the congressional passage of this important civil rights legislation designed to give people with disabilities access to the mainstream of American life, I jumped at the chance. To me, this represented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to combine my personal and political agendas. It culminated, as Ginny will remember, on a hot, July day—July 26, 1990. Some 3,000 people with and without disabilities gathered on the south lawn on the White House to see President Bush sign the bill into law and call: "Let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down." Those shameful walls, which had effectively excluded many persons with disabilities from employment opportunities, public facilities and services, and communication and transportation services, have begun to tumble down.

The ADA has been in effect for some 13 years. Like most reforms, it's a process of two steps forward and one step back, but it has made enormous differences in the lives of persons who were previously excluded from the mainstream of American life. The ADA, as you all know, is not applicable to religious congregations. When Ginny speaks to religious leaders about making their congregations more welcoming to people with disabilities, she is not armed with the legal backing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, but her answer is clear and clarion. "We must answer to a higher law," she observes and, indeed, she has had tremendous success in doing just that.

And Peter Thornburgh, the infant who was so seriously injured in that accident? Today, at age 43, he lives semi-independently in a supervised apartment near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He works as a full-time volunteer at a food bank there. When asked what he does, he replies, "I help poor people." Although, by our standards, he has a great many limitations, he has brought great joy into the lives of his family, his friends, and his colleagues, and, need I mention, his congregation, where he worships regularly.

Finally, the prophet reminds us "To Walk Humbly With Our God." This, in many ways, is the most difficult challenge of all to fulfill. Those of us in public life are not a particularly humble component of humankind. Humility means, first and foremost, that in facing the central decisions about careers, about goals, and about ambitions, we must first turn ourselves over to God. We can never act as if we alone have the wisdom and insight to provide the right answers to all of life's varied questions. It also means acknowledging when you are wrong—to the public, to be sure, but to your family, your friends and colleagues as well. These are hard tasks for those of us in public life. Whether elected or appointed, you are regularly tempted to try to create an aura of perfection and infallibility about yourself to ensure that you're maintained in office, obviously, but also to accomplish your well-intended goals. It doesn't work that way, and as difficult as it is, I'm bound to recount a couple of the humbling experiences in my life which have underscored this imperative.

First, and obviously, was when my world was turned upside down as a 28-year-old lawyer with the loss of my wife, a serious injury to my infant son and the heavy responsibility of being a single parent to three boys. I was truly humbled by the realization of precisely how fragile our lives, our hopes and our expectations can be in the face of life's uncertainties. We are all just a moment away from the next uncertainty that we have to deal with.

When seeking public office, and being defeated twice at the polls, in races for the Congress in 1966 and for the United States Senate in 1991 by voters who preferred my opponent, I was publicly humbled. Losing campaigns can



be devastating, to be sure, but they can be, and in my case were, mightily instructive as well. Indeed, lessons learned in defeat, as we all know, are sometimes of more value in the long run than those gained in victory or from a long, undefeated streak.

Later on, it was a complicated technology that humbled me when, after 72 days in the Governor's office, I had to deal with the crisis of an accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear facility near the capitol in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, something that had never happened before on the face of the earth. Nuclear energy, as some of you will recall, was then looked upon as the answer to our long-term energy problems with the promise of electric energy "too cheap to meter." Do you remember that? In March of 1979, however, we had to face a near meltdown at TMI, and there followed ten days of confusion, uncertainty and anxiety as we attempted to cope with the challenge of survival. At long last, with the help of a lot of good people and a strong community, and my prayers during that agonizing period, which were frequent and pointed, we were able to tell people it was safe to return home. Perhaps the most interesting chapter in my book, to those who remember that incident, will be the one on the Three Mile Island accident, and it was certainly the most humbling experience for me in the extreme.

Finally, I must say that my own reading habits have produced a particular variety of humility. I enjoy reading, mostly history and biography, and as I ponder the historic deeds and accomplishments of those who have gone before us, often against great odds, I'm in constant awe of these great feats and greatly humbled in consideration of my own experiences.

During all the challenges I set forth in my book, I've never hesitated to turn to God in prayer, not to achieve a particular result, win an election, or to derive a quick answer to a knotty problem, but for the strength and the wisdom and the patience to deal with whatever life brings to me. Those prayers have always been answered. Ginny has a wonderful observation that she saves for times of particular stress which has proved true for both of us. "God will provide," she reminds me and herself.

Before I close, I want to share with you an experience with my son Peter that puts all these aspects of my faith into sharp focus. Peter's impact on our life, as you can imagine, has been profound. It's been somewhat like Jesus' impact on his friends. Peter slows us down. Peter forces us to think about essentials. He's not impressed by the books I've read, or how often I'm on TV, or how quickly I can do the *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

Let me read from a book to which I contributed, a book by my friend, Willard Scott, known to many of you as a jolly weather man, but in truth a most thoughtful human being. I wrote in Willard's book, "The Older the

Fiddle, the Better the Tune,” a lesson for all of us. “One of our sons has a disability. He has mental retardation. In many ways, he has contributed the most to my comprehension of the good that can come from nearly every situation. He possesses a kind of quiet dignity that, despite his limitations, serves as an inspiration to all who know him. His own values are very much in order. Recently when visiting with us, he and I went to the Washington Zoo. We saw all the animals, and laughed together at the antics of many of them. At the end of our excursion, I asked him what he’d liked best about our experience, expecting a reply that took into account the unique characteristics of one or more of the animals we had seen. Instead, he responded quite simply, ‘being with you.’” Walk humbly with my God, indeed. What a transcendent message my son shared with me that day.

Finally, let me read to you from the last chapter of *Where The Evidence Leads*. I said there, “Although I seldom commented publicly about religious feelings that I consider basically private, my Christian beliefs have permeated my life. Prayer has always been a sustenance in our daily life and a solace in a time of stress. Never was an evening meal in our home commenced without grace asking the Lord’s blessings on our food and our lives, and regular church attendance has reminded us of the value of scripture as a polestar in our everyday endeavors. Both Ginny and I will be forever grateful for the blessings of our faith and the strength it has imparted to us. I think often of a yellowed newspaper clipping that Ginny pasted on the kitchen wall in our beloved home in Pittsburgh. The author is unknown to us. It asked, ‘If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict?’ My fondest hope is that the evidence presented in these reflections would be at least enough to get to a jury.”

Thank you all very much.

# Christ Our Advocate

by LAWRENCE M. STRATTON

I John 2: 1-2

*Lawrence M. Stratton is a Ph.D. candidate in Religion and Society and earned his M. Div. from PTS in 2002 and his J.D. from Georgetown University in 1992. He delivered this sermon as part of the Seminary's "Faith, Ethics, and the Law" conference on October 15, 2003 in Miller Chapel.*

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ* the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

IN ONE OF William Shakespeare's most famous lines, ironically appearing in one of his most obscure and neglected dramas—*Henry VI, Part 2*, Dick the Butcher proclaimed what he and other rebels should immediately do if their boorish leader Jack Cade's coup attempt succeeded. Just as they were about to invade London, Dick shouted: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."<sup>1</sup>

This hostility to lawyers has continued. Do you remember what the dinosaur did to the lawyer in the movie *Jurassic Park*? And the audience's approving response? A few years ago, Washington, D.C. journalist Jonathan Rauch called lawyers "parasites" in a cover story in the usually bland, *National Journal*. "Like ticks on a hound, Lawyers" suck the economic lifeblood from our society, he declared.<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully, not everyone agrees with Dick the Butcher's wish. For example, one lawyer, U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, noted in a dissenting opinion in a 1985 case dealing with veterans benefits and legal representation, that Dick the Butcher's line "is often misunderstood."<sup>3</sup> "Dick's statement," Stevens wrote, "was spoken by a rebel, not a friend of liberty." Moreover, the jurist said, "As a careful reading of the text will reveal, Shakespeare insightfully realized that disposing of lawyers is a step in the direction of a totalitarian form of government."

It might be easy to deconstruct William Shakespeare, but it is harder to escape some choice words about lawyers made by Jesus Christ. Perhaps foreshadowing contemporary medical malpractice disputes between lawyers, doctors, and insurance companies, Luke the doctor, unlike the other gospel

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2* (4.2.78).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Rauch, "The Parasite Economy," *National Journal*, 25 April 1992, 980.

<sup>3</sup> *Walters v. National Association of Radiation Survivors*, 473 U.S. 305, 371, n. 24 (1985) (Stevens, J., dissenting).



writers, recounts Jesus' furious denunciations of lawyers: "Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear" and "Woe to you lawyers!" and so forth (Luke 11: 46, 52). Using good lawyerly (or perhaps text critical) skills, we could distinguish Jesus' statements. But he is actually somewhat on target. The image of lawyers as potentially deceptive individuals is not completely unfounded.

In a famous letter to a young lawyer, Abraham Lincoln wrote, "There is a vague popular belief that lawyers are necessarily dishonest. I say vague, because when we consider to what extent confidence and honors are reposed in and conferred upon lawyers by the people, it appears improbable that their impression of dishonesty is very distinct and vivid. Yet the impression is common, almost universal."<sup>4</sup>

While condemning dishonest lawyers as "knaves" and "fiends," Lincoln said that good lawyers, those worthy of confidence and trust, have a unique opportunity to serve as *peacemakers*. This is the theme that former Pennsylvania Governor, U.S. Attorney General, and U.N. Undersecretary-General Dick Thornburgh beautifully set forth yesterday at the Continuing Education conference, "Faith, Ethics, and the Law." "The goal of using law to advance the concepts of justice and fairness for all of God's people—to create a better life, to make life more tolerable, to contribute to the quality of justice—is what being a good lawyer is all about," Thornburgh said.

It is in this context that we can understand the promise of today's text that Jesus Christ is our advocate. As Professor Clifton Black reminds us, "In ancient jurisprudence the 'advocate' was counsel for the defense before the court."<sup>5</sup>

In a world that, as the Psalmist notes, is full of injustice, oppression, and wickedness (cf. Psalm 82), a situation which is, in turn, compounded by our own faults and frailty, we have a righteous advocate who graciously forgives us and guide us along. Jesus Christ is the perfectly just judge and the innocent defendant who experienced the injustice of a sham legal proceeding and the death sentence. Triumphant in the resurrection, he now stands at our side. What better, more understanding or more merciful advocate could we have? He is the perfect model for a lawyer.

Theologian Ernst Troeltsch, sociologist Max Weber, Princeton Seminary Church historian, James Hastings Nichols, among others, have all described a solid line from the Reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers

<sup>4</sup> Keith W. Jennison, ed. *The Essential Lincoln* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1971), 20-22.

<sup>5</sup> C. Clifton Black, "The First, Second, and Third Letters of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XII, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) p. 388.

to the emergence of the constitutional precept of equality before the law which is enshrined in the façade of the U.S. Supreme Court, where it says, "Equal Justice Under Law."<sup>6</sup>

As we leave Miller Chapel today, let us all aspire to become advocates for others, following the path and example of Jesus Christ. Perhaps in addition to the phrase, "the priesthood of all believers," we might take up another motto, something like "universal bar membership." It does not have the same ring, but the principle is similar. Because of what Christ has done on our behalf, graciously serving as our advocate, we have the *freedom*, and *joy-filled duty* to courageously represent our sisters and brothers on this planet in pursuit of greater justice and equity in *their* lives.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Wyon Olive, trans. 1931 Reprint. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992). 2:4; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Kalberg Stephen, trans. (Los Angeles, Roxbury Publishing, 2002), 135-136, 222; James Hastings Nichols, *Democracy and the Churches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951). See also, David W. Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2003); Marci Hamilton, "The Calvinist Paradox of Distrust and Hope at the Constitutional Convention" in Michael W. McConnell, et al. eds. *Christian Perspectives on Legal Thought* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 293-306.

# Transformed Nonconformity: Spirituality, Ethics, and Leadership in the Life and Work of Martin Luther King, Jr.

by Walter Earl Fluker

*Walter Earl Fluker is the Executive Director of the Leadership Center, and Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Morehouse College and Visiting Professor of African-American Religious Traditions at Harvard University Divinity School. He is the author of They Looked for a City: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideal Community in the Thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr. (1989) and editor of The Stones That the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition (1998) and co-editor of A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life (1998). Director and editor of the Howard Thurman Papers Project and an ordained Baptist Minister, Dr. Fluker gave a shortened version of this Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lecture on December 1, 2003 in Miller Chapel.*

*The face of man is the medium through which the invisible in him becomes visible and enters into commerce with us.<sup>1</sup> Levinas*

*Lord guide me  
If you try me, send me out into the foggy night,  
so that I cannot see my way.  
Even if I stumble, this I beg,  
that I may look and smile serenely,  
bearing witness that you are with me and I walk in peace.  
If you try me,  
send me out into an atmosphere too thin for me to breathe  
and I cannot feel the earth beneath my feet,  
let my behavior show men that they cannot part me forcibly from you  
in whom we breathe and move and are.  
If you let hate hamper and trap me,  
twist my heart, disfigure me,  
then give my eyes,  
his love and peace,  
my face the expression of your Son.*

*Don Helder Camara  
The Desert is Fertile*

<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, Sean Hand, trans. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1990), 140.

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In the following discussion, I am using Martin Luther King, Jr.'s language of "transformed nonconformity," as a critical resource to examine the relationship between spirituality, ethics, and leadership in African-American churches.<sup>2</sup> I am also building on an argument begun in an earlier essay, entitled, "Recognition, Respectability, and Loyalty: The Quest for Civility in African-American Churches," where I contend that civility, as understood within the Black Church tradition, is both problematic and redemptive.<sup>3</sup> It is problematic because of its historical roots in what has been variously described as *the American dilemma*, i.e., the problem of *doubleness* in African-American history and culture. It is redemptive because black churches have dealt with the problematic in ways that have also produced three underlying social practices: recognition, respectability, and loyalty. These practices have informed a transformative praxis that has sought the best in American democratic idealism. My general inquiry is concerned, therefore, with black churches' socio-historical entrapment in race and ideology expressed most profoundly in the language of the *American dilemma* and the genealogy of civility in black churches as a *post-bellum* phenomenon.

In this continuing examination, I am interested in the question of African-American church leadership and the ways in which King's thematic of transformed nonconformity provides a conceptual and practical framework for rethinking leadership strategies for this new season of struggle and possibilities. I begin our discussion with operational definitions of spirituality, ethics, and leadership. I build upon the discussion of leadership literature that incorporates spirituality and ethics with a model of discourse that I refer to as "ethical leadership" which finds resonance with King's transformed nonconformity formulation. Secondly, I examine the ways in which his dialectical appropriation of knowledge, faith, and practice informed his view of transformed nonconformity. Finally, I recommend a conceptual grid for black church leadership that captures the inherent tensions in the *doubleness* of black life and offers directions for new subversive possibilities utilizing the triune ethical constructs of character, civility, and community.

<sup>2</sup> In his sermon, "Transformed Nonconformist," one first notices King's improvisational play with great ideas, borrowed from the critique of social conformity by Harry Emerson Fosdick, Eugene Austin, and other sources. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Transformed Nonconformist," in *Strength To Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 17-25. See also Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 105-108, 110-111, 164.

<sup>3</sup> See *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America*, edited by R. Drew Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 113-141.

## DEFINITIONS

*Spirituality*

Discussions of spirituality cover a broad and increasingly complex spectrum of beliefs, practices, and approaches within and beyond traditional religious circles. For our purposes, *spirituality refers to a way or ways of seeking or being in relationship with an Other who is believed to be worthy of reverence and highest devotion*. In this definition, I am concerned with the Other as inclusive of both individuality and community or in the language of Emmanuel Levinas, the Other has a face—and the face of the Other is the foundation of ethics and the origin of civil society.<sup>4</sup> I encounter the face of the Other, in its strangeness and transcendence—but also in its force of obligation and interdependence. The human face is also the Face that is hidden and present for me in all its force and meaning. The Face invites me to revel in memory—collective memory as diverse and beautiful as the world. If such a human face were to visit me then I would understand that I am not alone, unrelated neither to history nor to memory.<sup>5</sup>

Spirituality is also a discipline that places emphasis on *practice*—spirituality is something that we *do*. Prior to any act of cognition, spirituality has to do with the practical, day-to-day encounter with the Other, the Other being both friend and stranger, comrade and opposer, individual and collective, divine and demonic. In its active, dynamic expression, spirituality is *life generating* and *disfiguring*. Utilizing these indicators, I would like to talk about spirituality from three perspectives: 1) formal notions of spirituality that are related to established religions; 2) informal notions of spirituality that are

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Alfonso Lingis, trans. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 201. The question, “Can things have a face?” is important for the definition above. Levinas suggests that art may be an appropriate lens through which to identify “Being” in the face of a thing. He asks, “Is not art an activity that lends faces to things? Does not the façade of a house regard us? . . . We ask ourselves all the same if the impersonal but fascinating and magical march of rhythm does not, in art, substitute itself for sociality, for the face, for speech.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?,” in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Luther E. Smith’s definitions of spirit and spirituality are helpful. He writes, “Spirit is the ‘breath of God’ in creation, providing value and meaning to existence. Realizing and expressing itself in the material world, the work of the spirit is historical and political. It is the source for the definition of the individual, and the individual in relationship to the collective. As it discerns self, it discerns God and what it means to be a creature of God. . . . Spirituality is a way of life committed to understanding the nature and urgings of the spirit; the life organizes all its desires, energies, and resources so that they might be dominated by the spirit. Spirituality brings a harmony to living consistent with the peace and will of God.” Smith, *Howard Thurman: The Mystic As Prophet* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1981),



"self-actualized" or self-defined by individuals or small groups not associated with an established religious institution; and 3) philosophical or ethical notions of spirituality related to values and perceived goods, e.g. truth, beauty, justice, etc. King's understanding of spirituality is located within the first category of established religions, and incorporates the third category as it pertains to faith-based notions of ethics that are philosophically justified. I also use these three categories as heuristic devices that provide lenses through which to look at the vast landscape of a developing literature that incorporates ideas, beliefs, and practices from an array of traditions and perspectives—health, science, technology, politics, business, and education.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Examples of the first perspective on spirituality are those promoted within established religious institutions. Here there is a vast array of definitions and approaches to the subject. See for instance, Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds. *The Study of Spirituality* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1986), especially "Note on Spirituality," xiv-xvi. Emphasis is placed on traditions of contemplation, reflection, and mystical life practices within institutionalized religious forms. In recent years, there has been growing interest and awareness of ecumenical and interfaith practices of spiritualities that enhance understanding of respective religious traditions through common dialogue and sharing. See Thich Nhat Hahn, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995); Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999) and Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber, eds. *A Strange Freedom: Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). African-Americans tend not to place emphasis on "formalized structures" of spirituality. However, there is a significant presence and a growing literature, which suggest that the place of liturgy, ritual, and inherited practices have long standing in the life of African-American churches. In this perspective one finds the recent writings of Peter J. Paris, Cheryl Sanders, Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, Dwight Hopkins, and Renita Weems very helpful.

In respect to the second usage of spirituality, a stream of public conversations from Parker Palmer to Deepak Chopra, that incorporate therapeutic and self-actualization discourses have found audiences beyond the traditional academic and ecclesiastical institutions that have long dominated the contest. African-American women writers, theologians, preachers, clairvoyants, movements like the broadly defined New Age Spirituality, and Promise Keepers, are among the many competitors who compete for voice and place on a quickly changing playing field. See Deepak Chopra, *How to Know God: The Soul's Journey Into The Mystery of Mysteries* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000); Deepak Chopra, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams* (Amber-Allen Publishing and the New World Library, 1994); Herbert Benson, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief* (New York: Scribner's, 1996); Larry Dossey, M. D., *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and The Practice of Medicine* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); Larry Dossey, M. D., *Prayer Is Good Medicine: How To Reap The Healing Benefits of Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

The third area refers to the broader philosophical and ethical notions of *spirit*. Here spirituality is discussed as source of authority for private and public discourse that again are located across the spectrum of conservative, liberal, and progressive ideologies. William Bennett, ed., *The Moral Compass: Stories for a Life's Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Marianne Williamson, *Healing the Soul of America: Reclaiming Our Voices as Spiritual Citizens* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) and Michael Lerner, *Spirit Matters* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Road Publishing Co., 2000) may well represent the broad social and cultural context for the language game of spirituality in this perspective. See also Sara

*Ethics and Leadership*

I have outlined my thoughts on ethics and leadership in an earlier publication, where I define *ethical leadership* as the critical appropriation and embodiment of moral traditions that have historically shaped the character and shared meanings of a people (an *ethos*). Ethical leadership does not emerge from an historical vacuum, but arises from the *lifeworlds* of particular traditions and speaks authoritatively and acts responsibly with the aim of serving the collective good. Ethical leaders are leaders whose characters have been shaped by the wisdom, habits, and practices of particular traditions, often more than one, yet they tend to be identified with a particular ethos and cultural narrative. Ethical leadership asks the question of values in reference to ultimate concern.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, ethical leadership demands that we cultivate and nourish a *sense of self* that recognizes the interrelatedness of life or a *sense of community*. Spirituality plays a key role in this process. A *sense of community* refers to the larger extended ecological sphere made tangible by nature, defined as the universe and the cosmos, but in its final essence, it is *spirit*. This idea of spirituality finds resonance with Peter Paris's definition of spirituality in the African context, i.e., spirituality is never individualistic, but is part of a larger sphere of unity that is diverse in its dynamics and character. "The spirituality of a people," he writes, "refers to the animating and integrative power that constitutes the principal frame of meaning for individual and collective experiences."<sup>8</sup> For Robert M. Franklin, spirituality refers to "a person's sense of identity in relation to other people and that which is conceived as ultimate concern. Rooted in spiritual identity are a person's fundamental values, moral commitments, and ability to engage in ethical reasoning. Spiritual health is reflected in a person's ability to trust and care for others."<sup>9</sup>

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Lawrence-Lightfoot, *Balm in Gilead: The Journey of Healer*; James M. Washington, *Conversations With God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), Michael Dash, Jonathan Jackson, and Stephen Rasor; Peter J. Paris, Robert Franklin, and Stephen Carter are outstanding exemplars of theologians, ethicists, and educators who have done some significant work in the area of African-American spirituality.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Earl Fluker, ed., *The Stones That The Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership From The Black Church Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for A Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 22

<sup>9</sup> Robert Michael Franklin, *Another Day's Journey* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 86. See also Franklin's taxonomy in *The Spiritualities of the Black Church* where he places King in the social justice tradition, 42.

Looming large in this perspective is the question of ethics. In respect to its ethical dimension, spirituality is *life generating* and *disfiguring*; and its primary ethical locus is the human face. James Hillman writes, "The Other's face calls upon my character. Rather than thinking my character shows in my face and that my face is my character exteriorized . . . character requires the face of the Other. Its piercing provocation pulls us from every possible ethical potential. In bad conscience we turn away from the face in the wheelchair, the face of the beggar; we hood the face of the executed, and we ignore the faces of the socially ostracized and hierarchally inferior so that they become 'invisible' even as we walk down the same street."<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, this vulnerable face is *disfigured* in encounter with the Other—especially the Other who presents itself as Diabolos—as threat, tempter, and destroyer. In the struggle for social transformation the ethical leader experiences the transformation of self, which is a *disorienting*, *disfiguring*, and ultimately, a *dying* encounter with the Other. Don Helder Camara's prayer, in *The Desert is Fertile*, has much of the same force and import:

If you let hate hamper and trap me,  
twist my heart, disfigure me,  
then give my eyes,  
his love and peace,  
my face the expression of your Son.

In the experience of *disorienting*, *disfiguring*, and *dying*, the ethical leader also becomes aware of the transforming power of the encounter with the Other. For ethical leaders, as transformed nonconformists, this means that each encounter with the Other carries within itself the danger of *disfiguring*; of being tested and proven so that that which is hidden (and that which *calls* me) *discloses* itself in acts of compassion and justice. Ethical leaders, therefore, are *transformed* and *transforming* actors who present themselves to the world as symbols and for instances of what is possible and hopeful. In the experience of encounter, one is readied or predisposed to hope; hope being simultaneously the transformation of threat, temptation, danger, and death into a vision of the possible, a sense of values, a sense of the future, i.e., having faith to move on in creative activity that aspires to goodness. The task of the ethical leader is to *inspire* and *guide* others in the process of transformation through spiritual acts of defiance and resistance against systems of injustice. At a personal level, this process involves reliving and recovering their cultural

<sup>10</sup>James Hillman, *The Force of Character and The Lasting Life* (New York: Random House, 1999), 142.

futures through life stories, rituals and creative actions which give meaning to life; a focus is placed on reconciling acts of community with the primary theological and ethical question being, "*What Can I Hope For?*"

### *Spirituality, Ethics, and Leadership*

Why is the relationship between spirituality, ethics, and leadership important? First, leaders in many public venues are increasingly turning to approaches that emphasize some form of spirituality as an authoritative source in making decisions that impact the lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors of many people—especially in the areas of government, health, science and business. Often these appeals to spirituality fail to address the larger ethical questions of justice, equity, and truth-telling that are raised in public life.

The second reason is the role that spirituality and ethics will increasingly play in the development of leadership for the future. A significant challenge for the next generation of leadership will be the promotion and advancement of science, technology, and business to serve the interests of human development and the environment. The changes produced by this triumvirate have already resulted in a significant upheaval in society, the meaning of life, intelligence, and work. For example, there is a growing movement within profit and not-for-profit sectors to incorporate ethical principles and practices pertaining to issues of transparency, diversity, transcultural dynamics, sustainability, the environment, and human development. Increasingly, large corporations, think-tanks, and political leaders are relying upon spirituality as a form of human resource development to address these larger structural issues.

Finally, in order for a just civil society to exist, persons in responsible leadership roles must make decisions based on ethical guides.<sup>11</sup> Some of us argue that the most significant problem besetting civil society in the United States of America is the *failure of ethical leadership*.

<sup>11</sup> The question arises whether we must become ethical in order for society to exist or whether we are necessarily ethical in so far as we enter into the make-up of any actual society. The latter, of course, means that society is always, already directed by ethical—technically directive—principles and could not otherwise exist. But this forces us to distinguish between the ethical principles that happen to exist, and competing ethical principles that are after. Hence ethical principles are always embedded in actual practice, which means that leadership principles are necessarily based on ethical guides. In this view, the problem cannot be to categorically intrude ethical guides, which did not previously exist, but rather first to disengage the guides we know must be there; and second, to confront these with alternates, which we seek to demonstrate to be better. This is another way of saying there is always room for argument and discovery in ethics as a science, and that we must press on with counter-arguments, and open ourselves to its inherent possibilities, if we are to make spiritual progress. (Many thanks to Preston King for this observation).



For historically marginalized peoples, the relationship of spirituality, ethics, and leadership is most urgent. With the long-range economic, political, and social costs of war, a troubled market economy and rapid advances (crusades) in technology, science, and global democracy, if we believe analysts like Robert Kaplan, we now have the makings of a social anarchy that threatens the very foundations of our social purpose. The impending catastrophic fall-out of the present situation will have far-reaching negative consequences for the least of these—those whom Samuel Proctor called “the lost, the left-out, and left behind.” At a deeper level, however, there *is* a spiritual malaise, a nihilistic threat promoted by the predominance of a utilitarian individualism that appeals endlessly to therapeutic remedies that begin and end with *self*. Who will lead in the 21st century? Better yet, how shall they lead?<sup>12</sup> *Who will go for us, and whom shall we send?* What are the resources and methodologies at our disposal to train a new generation of leaders for this millennium?

#### MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AS A CRITICAL RESOURCE

The leadership legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. provides a critical resource for answers to these questions as we enter a new century beset by ethical issues and challenges. More than any other American leader in the twentieth century, King challenged the nation to take seriously the role of spirituality and ethics in resolving what the authors of *Habits of the Heart* called the most important unresolved contradiction in our history, the tension between “self-reliant competitive enterprise and a sense of public solidarity espoused by civic republicans.”<sup>13</sup> It was King’s spiritual genius that provided for him the essential assets and tools to lead a revolution of values that expanded the moral grammar of American history and culture from parochially applied democratic principles to concrete proposals for inclusiveness and action. This amazing feat, performed in a brief period of our history—from 1954 to 1968—was no doubt the nation’s finest example of what Martin Buber called “turning.” In doing so, King also changed the leadership equation: public leadership no longer belonged to the strict prov-

<sup>12</sup> In determining or establishing how we ought to lead, we must clearly identify the sort of leadership that it is vital to change—and why. In short, moral argument ought to clarify not just what it supports but also what it opposes. In the case of King, the question that arises is: Did he introduce new principles within the ethos of his *koinonia*? If so, what traditional principles was he opposing? If he was deploying merely traditional principles, how is it possible to explain their failures in the past and their triumph via King?

<sup>13</sup> Robert N. Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 256.



ince of position, power, and privilege, but also to the marginalized moral minority—those whom King labeled “transformed nonconformists.”

Much of the scholarship on Martin Luther King, Jr. has centered on his role as a civil rights leader, his eclectic intellectual formation, and his distinctive place within the African-American church tradition.<sup>14</sup> Little attention, however, has been given to the relationship between spirituality, ethics, and leadership in his thought and praxis.<sup>15</sup> This, of course, strikes one as surprising since the most casual observer of King's life and work cannot help but be struck by a deep-seated spirituality wedded to a strong sense of Christian character and vocation. It is not surprising, however, that with the noble heritage bequeathed to him by his family, the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Morehouse College, and the larger black Atlanta community, that King emerged as a luminous exemplar of the black church tradition of spirituality and social transformation. Equally revealing is his articulation of the thematic which characterizes the wedding of the notions of “spirituality” and “social transformation” in the language of “transformed nonconformity.”

<sup>14</sup> Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (N.Y.: Maryknoll, 1991); Clayborne Carson, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951*, Volume I, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); John Ansbro, *The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982); Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1986); David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Stephen Oates, *Let The Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: New American Library, 1982); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988). See especially Branch's treatment of Vernon Johns, pp. 1-26. William D. Watley, *Roots of Resistance: The Nonviolent Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985). See especially Chapter 1, “Formative Influences: Black Religious Experience, Evangelical Liberalism, and Personalism,” pp. 17-46. Walter E. Fluker, *They Looked For A City: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideal of Community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989); Lewis V. Baldwin, *There Is A Balm in Gilead: Understanding Martin Luther King, Jr. Within the Context of Southern Religious History* (Fortress Press, 1991); Lewis V. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole* (Fortress Press, 1991). For examples of articles which address the impact of the African-American church on King's intellectual and social development, see Cornel West, “Prophetic Christian as Organic Intellectual,” in *Prophetic Fragments*, pp. 3-12; James H. Cone, “Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Theology—Black Church,” *Theology Today* (January, 1984): 409-20; and Paul R. Garber, “King Was A Black Theologian,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 31 (Fall-Winter 1974): 16-32.

<sup>15</sup> With the notable exceptions of Peter J. Paris, Lewis V. Baldwin, Vincent Harding, and to some extent, Michael Eric Dyson, very little scholarship has been devoted to the spiritual biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the ways in which it shaped his role as a leader.

Embedded in his formulation of "transformed nonconformity" are significant elements of King's biography and thinking regarding the place of spirituality, ethics, and leadership in his dream of human community.

I will examine King's contributions in respect to the three overarching dimensions of character, civility, and community. At stake in this discussion is not the claim to a metaphysical model or mandate for spirituality. Rather we are looking at a developmental model which allows us to examine the ways in which spirituality, ethics, and leadership might be linked and provide a resource for training a new generation of leaders who are spiritually disciplined, morally anchored, and socially engaged. First, we will give attention to the ways in which his dialectical appropriation of knowledge, faith, and practice informed his view of transformed nonconformity.

### THE DIALECTIC OF TRANSFORMED NONCONFORMITY

#### *Truth is the Whole: King's Use of Dialectical Methodology*

An important element in King's thinking about spirituality, ethics, and leadership is the dialectical methodology which he employed as a critical and hermeneutical principle in his quest for truth-as-praxis. King acknowledged his indebtedness to Hegel for the philosophical method of rational coherence.<sup>16</sup> King rejected Hegel's "absolute idealism" because he felt it tended to merge the One and the Many, yet he was deeply influenced by the Hegelian contention that "truth is the whole." This contention led King to a philosophical method of rational coherence, which is a key personalist doctrine.<sup>17</sup> The dialectic enabled King to develop a methodology for dealing with

<sup>16</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958; 1964) 82; Ansbro, 119-128. King's major philosophical and theological studies at Boston University were with Edgar Sheffield Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. It was mainly under these thinkers that King studied personalism. Smith and Zepp suggest that there are four significant themes of personalism which shaped King's intellectual quest for the beloved community: 1) the inherent worth of personality; 2) the personal God of love and reason; 3) the moral law of the cosmos; and 4) the social nature of human existence. Smith and Zepp, *Search for Beloved*, 118. King stated that personal idealism was his basic philosophical position. He credits personalism with two valuable contributions to his developing religious and ethical convictions: the metaphysical and philosophical grounding of the idea of a personal God and a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality. King, *Stride*, 82. Under E. S. Brightman's tutelage, he began studying the philosophy of Hegel. Although he was primarily concerned with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, he also read his *Philosophy of Right* and *Philosophy of History*.

<sup>17</sup> Brightman had written that rational coherence is a method of verification of truth. He maintained that a proposition was true if it met the following criteria: 1) it is self-consistent; 2) it is consistent with all known facts of experience; 3) it is consistent with all other propositions held as true by the mind that is applying this criterion; 4) it establishes explanatory and interpretative relations between various parts of experience; and 5) these relations include all known aspects of experience and all known problems about experience

conflict and struggle, in both his personal and public life. More revealing, however, is the fact that dialectical thinking has long been a hallmark of black religious traditions. Cornel West claims that

Black theologians have either consciously or unconsciously employed a dialectical methodology in approaching their subject matter. This methodology consists of a three-step procedure of negation, preservation, and transformation; their subject matter, of white interpretations of the Christian gospel and their own circumstances. Dialectical methodology is critical in character and hermeneutic in content. For black theologians, it is highly critical of dogmatic viewpoints of the gospel, questioning whether certain unjustifiable prejudgments are operative. It is hermeneutic in that it is concerned with unearthing assumptions of particular interpretations and presenting an understanding of the gospel that extends and expands its ever-unfolding truth.<sup>18</sup>

*The Dialectic of Self: Freedom and Finitude*

Transformation, for King, is a dynamic process born of dialectical tensions between the freedom and finitude of persons and the corollary notions of individuality and democracy. A consistent theme in King's moral anthropology is his view of the dialectical nature of persons that is rooted in their spiritual and physical existences. While we share our physical existence with other forms of nature, persons are also spiritual and rational beings. For King, this is our crucial link with God. Human beings are not only biological creatures; they are also spiritual beings with the capacity for reason and self-transcendence.<sup>19</sup> Persons are both children of nature and children of spirit; they live in two realms, the internal and external. The internal is that realm of spiritual ends expressed in art, literature, morals, and religion. The external is that complex of devices, techniques, mechanisms, and instrumen-

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in its details and as a whole. Edgar S. Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1940), 128.

<sup>18</sup> Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 108-9.

<sup>19</sup> Rationality, says King, distinguishes persons from the lower animals for "Somehow man is in nature, and yet he is above nature; he is in time, and yet he is above time; he is in space, and yet he is above space. This means that man can do things lower animals could never do. He can think a poem and write it; he can think a symphony and compose it; he can think up a great civilization and create it." Martin Luther King, Jr., "What Is Man?" in *The Measure of a Man* (Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1959), 8.

talities by which we live.<sup>20</sup> The existential problem of persons, according to King, is the struggle to live a balanced existence in which the "means" by which we live do not outdistance the ends for which we live. This is the ongoing struggle for each person and whenever one allows the "means" to dominate the "ends," the occasion for sin is present.<sup>21</sup> This creates a "persistent civil war" within, "a tragic schizophrenic personality divided against ourselves."<sup>22</sup> This inner struggle, according to King, presents itself as a test—a test of character; character being the revelation of freedom over fatedness. (Later, in our discussion, I will comment on how this inner tension is a sign of the disfiguring, nonconforming praxis of spirituality, ethics and leadership.) The resolution of this inner conflict is wrought about by the grace of God. The inherent potential for goodness within persons and the intervening grace of God were the basis for King's hope in respect to the actualization of human community.<sup>23</sup>

*The Dialectic of Society: Individuality and Democracy*

As part of King's embrace of the dialectical interplay with thought and action, there is also the social corollary of individuality and democracy.<sup>24</sup> For King, because persons are decidedly communitarian, the logic of individuality is fulfilled in community and the best-suited social political context for this

<sup>20</sup> King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967),

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<sup>21</sup> King sermon, "Unfulfilled Dreams," in *A Knock At Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 194-195; King sermon, "Thou Fool," Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Chicago, August 27, 1967, 4-5, King Archives, Atlanta, GA; and King, "What Is Man?", 11.

<sup>22</sup> King, "Loving Your Enemies," in *Strength to Love*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> See King, "An Answer to a Perplexing Question," in *Strength to Love*, 134-137; King's understanding of the moral life of persons is religious, i.e. faith precedes morality. While it is true that we all are created in the image of God, there is a tension at the heart of human nature "between good and evil" which tends to drag persons down to lower levels of existence. King, op cit, "Unfulfilled Dreams." Because of the dialectical nature of self, there is an endless struggle between freedom and finitude, which wars against moral perfection. King affirmed with the Apostle Paul, "The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, I do." King, "What is Man?", 12.

<sup>24</sup> Cornel West aptly states this idea in his treatment of "prophetic Christianity": "For prophetic Christianity, the two inseparable notions of freedom are existential freedom and social freedom. Existential freedom is an effect of the divine gift of grace which promises to sustain persons through and finally deliver them from the bondage to death, disease, and despair. Social freedom is the aim of Christian political practice, a praxis that flows from the divine gift of grace; social freedom results from the promotion and actualization of the norms of individuality and democracy. Existential freedom empowers people to fight for social freedom, to realize its political dimension. Existential freedom anticipates history and is ultimately transhistorical, whereas social freedom is thoroughly a matter of this worldly human liberation." Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance!*, 18.



realization is democracy. In his many statements about law and resisting unjust laws, the underlying assumption is that moral agency is best equipped to interact and respond to power in situations that are *rational* and *just*. But since the rational nature of human beings seeks conformity to law, people are inclined to make conformity the normative equation for truth and justice. Such conformity, according to King, yields to blindness of action and staleness of culture. Blind conformity makes us paranoid and distrustful of opinions that go against the majority; stale conformity quietly supports the status quo through inaction that leads to apathy and neglect of our duties as citizens. “[M]ost people,” he writes, “and Christians in particular are thermometers that record and register the temperature of majority opinion, not thermostats that transform and regulate the temperature of society.”<sup>25</sup>

Nonconformity, on the other hand, is not a good in and of itself; rather it must be transformed through spiritual regeneration, which is an ongoing, disciplined and deliberate practice characterized by love for the neighbor. Untransformed nonconformity, for King, leads to unwarranted suspicion and calloused intolerance. Important for King, therefore, was the pragmatic thrust of law as an active, dynamic article that is renewed through conflict and struggle, through negation, preservation, and transformation. Democracy at its best, for King, is a squabble; a contentious exchange of ideas, opinions, values, and practice within the context of civil relations.

### *The Dialectic of Spirit: Love and Justice*

King’s spiritual quest was rooted in his belief in a personal God of love and justice. Although King perceived the primary nature of God to be in the divine goodness expressed in *agape*, he made a critical distinction between the love of God and the justice of God. In his sermon entitled “A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart,” he holds the two concepts in dialectical tension. God’s relationship to persons is presented as a creative synthesis between the wrath and justice of God and God’s love and grace. King claims, “God has two outstretched arms. One is strong enough to surround us with justice, and one is gentle enough to embrace us with grace.”<sup>26</sup> The justice of God is manifested in the moral law of the cosmos, which is an imperative for persons to struggle against all forms of injustice working against the actualization of human community. The power of God furnishes those who struggle for

<sup>25</sup> King, “Transformed Nonconformity,” in *Strength to Love*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> King, “A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart,” in *Strength to Love*, 15.



justice with the inner resources to bring about creative change that leads to just and loving human relations.<sup>27</sup>

For King, transformation is possible because of the way in which the universe is structured. He believed that God "has placed within the very structure of the universe certain absolute moral laws. We can neither defy them nor break them. If we disobey them, they will break us."<sup>28</sup> King's belief in the moral law enabled him to maintain optimism in the ultimate victory of good over evil as persons choose to become co-workers with God in fulfilling divine purposes in human history. This belief in the moral law was the basis for his attack upon unjust structures and laws that desacralized human personality. Segregation statutes and other unjust laws, he argued, should be abolished not only because they are against the principles of democracy, but also because they are ultimately against the moral law of the cosmos. An unjust law, according to King, is a human code that is not in harmony with the moral law. Therefore, it is the transformed nonconformist's moral responsibility to break unjust laws. Just laws, on the other hand, are laws that uplift human personality and should be obeyed because they are in harmony with the moral law.<sup>29</sup>

The transformed nonconformist, according to King, is under obligation to the moral law. Christians, as a creative minority, must never conform to the prevailing laws and customs of a society when they are in conflict with human dignity and justice. Moreover, Christians are called upon to break the law as an expression of their respect for law itself. "The hope of a secure and liveable world lies with the disciplined nonconformists, who are dedicated to justice, peace, and brotherhood."<sup>30</sup>

But more is at stake in his view of transformed nonconformity—the regenerated individual is a "transformed nonconformist" in society, and following the way of Christ, is willing to suffer redemptively for others.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-16. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Books, The New American Library, 1964), 82; see also King, "Transformed Nonconformist," in *Strength to Love*, 17-25.

<sup>28</sup> King, "Our God Is Able," *Strength to Love*, 110. King writes, "There is a law in the moral world—a silent, invisible imperative, akin to the laws of the physical world—which reminds us that life will only work in a certain way. The Hitlers and the Mussolinis have their day, and for a period they may wield great power, spreading themselves like a green bay tree, but soon they are cut down like grass and wither as the green herb." Ibid, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Books, The New American Library, 1964), 82.

<sup>30</sup> King, "Transformed Nonconformist," in *Strength to Love*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> King writes, "To be a Christian, one must take up his cross, with all its difficulties and agonizing and tragedy-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its marks upon us and redeems us to that more excellent way which only comes through suffering." Ibid., 25.

The “transformed nonconformist” refuses to cooperate with evil systems that exploit and destroy human personality, and willingly suffers the penalty of law for nonconformity. For the person who suffers redemptively for the sake of others, life becomes a living sacrament of the Presence of God in the world, working for universal wholeness.<sup>32</sup>

THE ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF TRANSFORMED NONCONFORMITY:  
CHARACTER, CIVILITY, AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

King’s dialectical treatment of transformed nonconformity helps us to better understand the place of character in respect to leadership. For the most part, character is relegated to a type of abstract individualism in leadership literature where the emphasis is placed on certain principles or practices that the individual appropriates in order to become an effective leader. Character, in both King’s biography and in his expressed opinions on the same, emphasizes the dimensions of freedom and finitude, individuality and democracy, and love and justice. Character, in this perspective, is the narrative script that defines individuality: the stories that name the individual’s experience and the “inner experiences” or core philosophies espoused by the individual within the context of a given community. A significant variable that is often not emphasized or completely neglected in leadership studies is the role of systems (institutions, traditions, practices) and their impact on the moral development of leaders. Simply stated, individuals are socially constructed, yet by definition, are responsible and accountable for moral choices within the context of their social histories and stories. Hence the pertinent questions for ethical leadership in this respect are: Of what story or stories is the individual a part and how does the story (or stories) inform moral practices and habits? What is the role of institutions in this narrative perspective and how might the moral agent develop habits and practices that conspire against unjust institutional practices that promote unhealthy and self-destructive existence?

Most mark King’s public career with his leadership of the Montgomery Improvement Association, but before Montgomery his was a story intertwined with other stories that produced the grandiloquent baritone, which proclaimed the message of transformed nonconformity to America and the world. We must ask, therefore, “What was the narrative script that King was reading when he arrived in Montgomery?” “How had history uniquely prepared him for this grand performance?” Some of the answers lie in his

<sup>32</sup> King, “Loving Your Enemies,” *Strength to Love*, 53–54.

early formation, in the contexts of his family environment, the fellowship of the black church, and in the larger context of the black community of Atlanta, Georgia. In these interrelated environs one sees most clearly the genesis of his spiritual quest and the developing character that accompanied his vision.<sup>33</sup> In a revealing statement in his "Autobiography of Religious Development," written while he was a student at Boston University School of Theology, King reflects on his reasons for entering the ministry and his early childhood experiences with his family and church.

At present I still feel the effects of the noble moral and ethical ideals that I grew up under. They have been real and precious to me, and even in moments of theological doubt I could never turn away from them. Even though I never had an abrupt conversion experience, religion has been real to me and closely knitted to life. In fact the two cannot be separated; religion for me is life.<sup>34</sup>

### *Character and the Larger Dramatic Repository of Transformed Nonconformity*

King's dialectical appropriation of knowledge only touches the surface of what was at stake in his inner struggles of spirit and his inherited historical burdens of recognition, respectability, and loyalty.<sup>35</sup> The dialectical formulation of the theme of transformed nonconformity is at once an expression of King's sermonizing and of his own existential struggle with personal freedom and social liberation.<sup>36</sup> Michael Eric Dyson and others have documented this internal struggle and shown how this inner tension of opposites informs the social discourse of King. Dyson, commenting on the criticisms of King's promiscuity and plagiarism, suggests:

<sup>33</sup> Walter Earl Fluker, *They Looked For A City*, 82-86.

<sup>34</sup> King, "An Autobiography of Religious Development," in Clayborne Carson, Senior Editor, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Called To Serve*, Volume I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 363; see also King, "Statement to the American Baptist Convention," 7 August 1959, in Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers. Here King shares his call to ministry.

<sup>35</sup> Fluker, "Recognition, Respectability, and Loyalty," in R. Drew Smith, ed. *New Day Begun: African American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 113-141.

<sup>36</sup> A cursory reading of King's sermons reveals how he utilizes this methodology to analyze and reinterpret long standing biblical truths in his quest for personal and social transformation. See "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," 13-14; "Transformed Nonconformist," 18-19; "On Being a Good Neighbor," 35-46; "Loving Your Enemies," 47-55; "How Should a Christian View Communism," 96-105; "Antidotes to Fear," 115-26; "The Answer to a Perplexing Question," 127-37 in *Strength to Love*. See also King's unpublished sermons: "Is the Universe Friendly," 8-9, "Thou Fool," 2-4; and "Discerning the Signs of History," King Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

Character cannot be understood through isolated incidents or a fixation on the flaws of a human being during a selected period in life. Assessment of character must take into account the long view, the wide angle. Character is truly glimpsed as we learn of human beings negotiating large and small problems that test moral vision, ethical creativity, and sound judgement. Character cannot be grasped in disjointed details or sporadic facts. Character can only be glimpsed in a sustained story that provides plausible accounts and credible explanations of human behavior.<sup>37</sup>

King firmly believed that inner transformation is essential to involvement in social transformation. Transformation, however, is not equated with moral perfectionism; rather it is understood as an inner quality of life that issues forth in deeds of goodwill and love for the neighbor. "In the final analysis," says King, "what God requires is that your heart is right. Salvation isn't reaching the destination of absolute morality, but it's being in the process and on the right road."<sup>38</sup> For him, the person who opens her life to God in Christ experiences a new birth and a reorientation of values that enables her to struggle for social transformation. "Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in an humble and loving spirit," King writes.<sup>39</sup>

For the development of leaders for the church and society, King provides a helpful insight into the centrality of "the inner theater" in the formation and care of leaders. "The inner theater" represents those core themes that affect an individual's personality and leadership style. "For each of us, our unique mixture of motivational needs determine our character and creates the triangle of our mental life—a tightly interlocked triangle consisting of cognition, affect, and behavior. No one of these dimensions of the triangle can be seen as separate from the other."<sup>40</sup> The cultivation of the private life or one's "inner theater" is the basis for spirituality and ethical awareness. Leaders involved in acts of social transformation must begin by remembering, retelling, and reliving their own stories. Again and again we must ask ourselves what and whom are we seeking to change. This is the first step in the realization of calling and character.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The Real Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 166.

<sup>38</sup> King, "Unfulfilled Dreams," 6.

<sup>39</sup> King, "Transformed Nonconformist," 23.

<sup>40</sup> Manfred Kets De Vries, *The Leadership Mystique*, 5.

Character, in this sense, refers to “the morally-anchored self in the context of socio-historical narrative.”<sup>41</sup> For our purposes, this means the person’s life experiences in relation to larger historical and social narratives. Reclaiming the ethical center requires that the unfinished business of one’s life story (the pain, the hurt, the unresolved contradictions) be addressed. It also means reattachment to historically grounded virtues, which have protected the community through ritualistic healing: integrity and self-esteem, trust and empathy, and courage and hope as both personal and political practices. One should not (or better, cannot) begin the work of creating a just and healthy civil society until one has explored the deepest regions of self-knowledge and the motivational content of agency that mark the core of individuality, personal morals, and practices.

While there are formidable social, political, and economic issues that must be confronted, I am convinced that a critical dimension of the battle must be waged from within. King teaches us that even though the contradictions of life may never be completely resolved, our inner tensions can become the creative sources for self-reflection, healing, and dynamically engaged social praxis—in other words, self-reflection and personal healing are inextricably tied to empathy and care for others. In King’s language, the cross is the single interpretive paradigm for understanding the role of the transformed non-conformist in the quest for civility and community:

My personal trials have taught me the value of unmerited suffering . . . I have lived these past few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive. There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, others consider it foolish, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can humbly say, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>42</sup>

### *Spirituality and Social Justice*

King’s character was intricately related to his spiritual life and his quest for social justice. The pre-Montgomery King or the faces of “Little Mike,” “Tweed,” and “The Philosopher King,” do not readily lend themselves to the character that is disclosed in the moments of testing that follow his public

<sup>41</sup> Laurence Thomas, *Living Morally: A Psychology of Moral Character* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 17–26.

<sup>42</sup> King, “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” in *Strength to Love*, 154.



ministry in Montgomery and thereafter.<sup>43</sup> It is rather in engagement with the struggle for social justice that one begins to see the deep, furrowed glance of the preacher become leader of the people. This understanding of spirituality is not the same as the market-stimulated self-help philosophies on spiritual growth that promote personal development and solipsistic narcissism as the means to attain spiritual awareness that crowd the shelves in mega-bookstores. Rather his brand of spirituality stands in direct contradiction to the conforming, anesthetizing cultural deluge that dominates the printed and audio-visual media on leadership.

### *The Kitchen Vision*

I cite here two events in King's life where one sees clearly the relationship between spirituality and social transformation in his portraiture of character. One is the oft-cited "kitchen vision." David Garrow maintains that the "kitchen vision" of 27 January 1956, which took place in the early stages of the Montgomery boycott, was the paradigmatic moment in King's spirituality.<sup>44</sup> The experience captures for us an example of the way in which King understood spirituality to be part of a larger dynamic of ethics and leadership. It is also a revealing portrait of the testing of character that is integral to the spirituality of transformed nonconformity. Caught in the early phases of the Montgomery bus boycott, he received a chilling telephone call threatening his life and the life of his family: The voice on the other end of the phone, said, "Nigger, we are tired of you and your mess now. And if you are not out of town in three days, we're going to blow your brains out, and blow up your house." King says he "sat there and thought about his little daughter who had just been born" and his "devoted and loyal wife" who was asleep. He thought about how he might be taken from her or she from him. He thought about

<sup>43</sup> These "faces" refer, respectively to the early stages of King's development. "Little Mike," refers to his early formation under the shadow of a powerful father-figure; "Tweed" was the nickname of his teenage years at Morehouse College; and "The Philosopher King," as he was dubbed, is a reference to his university days in Boston. Levinas writes, "The face of man is the medium through which the invisible in him becomes visible and enters into commerce with us."

<sup>44</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 58-63; see also, David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 57-58; David Garrow, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Spirit of Leadership," in *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle*, edited by Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 11-34. I agree with Lewis Baldwin and Preston Williams that this vision, while important, should not be considered as an isolated phenomenon, but should be understood as one among other experiences in King's spiritual odyssey and as an example of the black church's belief in the intimacy of the divine in struggles for justice. Lewis Baldwin, *There Is A Balm*, 189; and Preston N. Williams, "The Public and Private Burdens of Martin Luther King, Jr.," *The Christian Century* (25 February 1987), 198-99.

his father and mother who had always been the steadying influences for him in trying moments, but they were one hundred seventy-five miles away in Atlanta. He said to himself:

You've got to call on that something in that person your Daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way . . . And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee. I never will forget it . . . I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. I think the cause we represent is right. But Lord I must confess that I am weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak."

Then it happened:

And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world." . . . I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.<sup>45</sup>

### *Howard Thurman and the Harlem Stabbing Incident*

In a lesser-known incident, Howard Thurman made one of his famous pastoral visits to Martin Luther King, Jr. Thurman states in his autobiography that on more than one occasion he felt a premonition to minister to leaders engaged in the thick of the struggle. His relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr. is but one example.<sup>46</sup> After the stabbing of Martin Luther

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Several writers have made reference to the influence of Thurman on his younger visionary. See Lerone Bennett, *What Manner of Man*, 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1976), 74-75; John Ansbro, *The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), 27-29, 272; "Dr. King Mentor Remembered," *The Boston Globe*, 15 January 1982, 13-14; Lewis V. Baldwin, "Understanding Martin Luther King, Jr. Within the Context of Southern Black Religious History," *Journal of Religious Studies* 13:2 (Fall 1987):19; Lewis V. Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, the Black Church and the Black Messianic Vision," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Center* 12:1-2 (Fall 1984/Spring 1985):1; and Larry Murphy, "Howard Thurman and Social Activism," in *God and Human Freedom: A Festschrift in Honor of Howard Thurman* (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1983), 154-155. Perhaps, Thurman's own accounting of his relationship with King is sufficient for our purposes: "I am one of a few and maybe the only person who was a

King, Jr. in Harlem on 20 September 1958, Thurman felt the inner necessity to go to him. In reference to this movement of the Spirit upon him, he writes:

Many times through the years I have had strange visitations in which there emerges at the center of my consciousness *a face*, a sense of urgency, a vibrant sensation, involving some particular person. On a certain Friday afternoon, Martin emerged in my awareness and would not leave. When I came home I said to Sue [Thurman's wife], "Tomorrow morning I am going down to New York to see Martin. I am not sure why, but I must talk with him personally if the doctors permit."<sup>47</sup>

During his visit with the young civil rights leader, Thurman encouraged him to extend his convalescence four weeks beyond those recommended by his doctor in order "to reassess himself in relation to the cause, to rest his body and mind with healing detachment, and to take a long look that only solitary brooding can provide." Thurman suggested, "The movement had become an organism with a life of its own to which he [King] must relate in fresh and extraordinary ways or be swallowed up by it."<sup>48</sup> King's biographers indicate that he did indeed take an extended convalescence culminating in his trip to the land of Gandhi in February 1959. Taylor Branch writes: "Recovering at home, King settled into a period of relative stillness unique to his entire adult life. He delivered no speeches or sermons outside the Dexter

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member of the faculty of the Graduate School of Theology at Boston University when Dr. King took his doctorate degree who did not have him in the classroom. I think this is a mark of distinction. We had contacts, but our primary contact was sitting around my television watching the World Series . . . I've known him and his family, his mother and father for many years. And Mrs. Thurman's and my relationship to those two young people (Martin and Coretta King) was a personal and primary one. It was not involved in the light and the drama. My concern was always about the state of his spiritual life all the time. And I felt it was my relationship with him that gave me the right to do it, while Mrs. Thurman's interest was always in the little things involving the children and the wife of a man who had to live his private life in public. And this is a great agony. I understand from one of his biographers that a book that I wrote in 1949 was very influential on his thinking: *Jesus and the Disinherited*. But I did not hear this from him and I do not make a claim of it; but lest someone may know that it is in this biographical statement you will think that I am trying to be falsely modest by not mentioning it; so I've done it and now I can go on with my work." Thurman, "Litany and Words in Memoriam for Martin Luther King, Jr.," The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, San Francisco, California, 7 April 1968, Howard Thurman Educational Trust, San Francisco, California.

<sup>47</sup> Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (Harcourt, Brace and Javonovich and, 1979) 254-255.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 255. Thurman recommended an "additional four weeks to those that the doctor felt you [King] needed for complete recovery." "Howard Thurman to Martin Luther King, Jr.," 20 October 1958, King Papers, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University.

pulpit for many weeks. Nor did he travel." Branch also reports that King turned down the pressing agenda within the Movement during this period.<sup>49</sup> Stephen B. Oates reports that

As he convalesced, King had time to do what he had longed for all these months: he read books and meditated. And he talked a good deal about the trial he was going through. He decided that God was teaching him a lesson here, and that was personal redemption through suffering. It seemed to him that the stabbing had been for a purpose, that it was part of God's plan to prepare him for some larger work in the bastion of segregation that was the American South.<sup>50</sup>

These two events point to ways in which King understood spirituality to be more than a matter of personal development. For him, the issues of justice and community and the place of suffering are integral parts of the ongoing spiritual process that the transformed nonconformist must endure in his or her quest for wholeness. Such a process is fraught with provocations, challenges, and hopes that are rooted in larger historical and social narratives than the popular, mass-produced therapeutic formulae for personal healing and virtue. Moreover, they are statements about the *disorienting, disfiguring, and dying* experience of transformed nonconformity. Unlike the popular discourse on spirituality, which isolates the individual from the traffic of lifeworlds and systemworlds, King's experience of the divine is at the dangerous intersection where these worlds collide. Spirituality, ethics, and leadership, in this view, complicate the rather naïve conjecture that the leader experiences the transforming power of the divine apart from engagement with the powers of this world. Far from the pollyana, wishful practices of leadership defined by corporate behemoths, here the emphasis is on the care of others who are impacted by the leader's ethical discernment, deliberation, and decisions. The ability to hear the voice of the divine is intricately interwoven with the care of the vulnerable other—the other, in the first case, being the black and poor people of Montgomery who have entrusted the young King with their future.

In the Harlem Hospital event, there is clearly a sense of self that is related to the larger spiritual community. Thurman sees King's *face*—a *face* that is

<sup>49</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 245.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: New American Library, 1982), 140. See also David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1986), 111-113.



tested—and in this *face*, the fulfillment of the possibility and hope a larger community. Thurman's advice and counsel provides King with the opportunity to deepen his own channels and commitment to the struggle for social transformation in the American South. For Thurman, spiritual discipline exposes the individual to "the tutor" or the "unseen model" by which one structures the facts of his or her experience. For this reason, Thurman counseled:

[T]he person concerned about social change must not only understand the materials with which he has to do, the things which he is trying to manipulate, to reorder, to refashion but again and again he must expose the roots of his mind to the literal truth that is the tutor of the facts, the orderer and reorderer of the facts of his experience.<sup>51</sup>

This must be done, Thurman contended, so that in the quest for social justice, one's vision of society never conforms to some external pattern, but is "modeled and shaped in accordance to the innermost transformation that is going on in his spirit."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it was his insistence that those who were engaged in acts of liberation continually examine the sources of their motivation and the ways in which the circling series of social processes that they seek to change are related to their spiritual pilgrimages. Always, the primary questions for the social activist are, "*What are you trying to do with your life? What kind of person are you trying to become?*"<sup>53</sup> It was Thurman's conviction that the individual in his or her actions "is trying to snare into the body of his facts, his conviction of those facts." He cautioned, however, that faith thusly understood always runs the risk of becoming idolatrous as in patriotic visions of "the American way."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, one must always examine the motivational content of action that involves a tutoring of the will by an unseen model, which for him was the truth that is resident within the individual. Here the issues of *identity*, *purpose*, and *method* are combined in relation to the social context in which the individual finds himself or herself.

### Civility

Civility is used in a variety of contexts often masking complex historical, sociological, and methodological issues. Civility in common usage refers to a

<sup>51</sup> Thurman, "He Looked For A City." Taped Sermon, Marsh Chapel, Boston University, 2 January 1955, Special Collections, Mugar Library, Boston University.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> See Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 26-37, where he discusses three primary questions related to the discipline of commitment. They are respectively, "Who am I?", "What do I want?" and "How do I propose to get it?"

<sup>54</sup> Thurman, "He Looked For A City."



set of manners, certain etiquette and social graces that are rooted in specific class orientations and moral sensibilities.<sup>55</sup> Civility, however, does not simply refer to etiquette, manners, and social graces; rather it is inclusive of *social capital* and the inherent benefits accrued by *networks of reciprocity*. Civility also has to do with the individual's social dignity within that system. In the following discussion, the term civility is used as a framework for discussing the role of *social capital* in the leaders' repository of skills and competencies essential for negotiation and working for transformation in public space.<sup>56</sup> I do not limit civility, however, to social capital, but refer more broadly to the concept as *the social-historical script or contract that the individual citizen negotiates within the context of the larger society. Civility is the psychosocial ecology of the individual; a certain understanding or self-referential index of the individual's place within a social system as it relates to character.* For King, as we shall see, civility is used as a subversive instrument to exaggerate the creative tension between conformity and nonconformity in the quest for a higher synthesis of transformed nonconformity.

### *Transformed Nonconformity and Subversive Civility*

In black life generally, civility as a social and political option is severely limited. In fact, some scholars even question its utility as a political good.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, in black churches, because of the ideological and cultural precedents of *doubleness* and racial uplift among black elites, civility has come to represent precisely that—a social and political good elevated to the level of *civic virtue*. In this respect, it has to do with “the rules of association of free members (of society) and so the basis of social dignity.”<sup>58</sup> Evelyn Brooks-

<sup>55</sup> Amitai Etzioni's definition of civility is helpful. “The term civility has been used in different ways, most commonly it has referred to the need to deliberate in a civil manner about the issues society faces, and to sustain intermediary bodies that stand between the individual and the state.” Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 95-96.

<sup>56</sup> Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* is one example of the ongoing public debate on the significance of civil discourse and social networking that is part of a larger conversation about the need to recapture, reappropriate, and sustain the habits and practices essential for the survival of an American ethos of generalized reciprocity and mutual obligation. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). See especially Putnam's discussion on the significance of “social capital” as both a bonding and bridging social phenomenon and its relationship to civic infrastructures that build community. Bonding refers to the ways in which social capital tends to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups. Bridging refers to ways in which social capital tends to produce broader and more inclusive group behavior and to encourage reciprocity. (22-24)

<sup>57</sup> James Schmidt, “Is Civility a Virtue?” in *Civility*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 17-19.

<sup>58</sup> Lawrence Cahoon, “Civic Meetings, Cultural Meanings” in Rouner, *Civility*, 46.

Higginbotham's examination of the "politics of respectability" signals part of what is at stake in the usages of civility as a social and political strategy for citizenship rights among women of the Negro Club Movement.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, early architects of the modern civil rights movement utilized civility as a means of cultivating habits and practices that conspired toward engagement in democratic society. Most notable among these leaders in mid-twentieth century were black religious elites and pastors such as Reverdy Ransom, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, Howard Thurman, Benjamin Mays, and William Stuart Nelson.<sup>60</sup>

The leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the modern civil rights movement represents the most outstanding example of this legacy of civility. Perhaps better than any other leader of the twentieth century, King was able to forge civility into a subversive weapon in the struggle for equality and justice in American society. By subversive civility, what I have in mind is akin to Jeffery Goldfarb's observation that intellectuals "contribute to a democratic life when they civilize political contestation and when they subvert complacent consensus; when they provide enemies with the discursive possibility to become opponents and when they facilitate public deliberations about problems buried by the norms of civility."<sup>61</sup> King's distinctive contribution in this regard is the way in which he dialectically explores the options afforded by democratic life and forces existing tensions through nonviolent

<sup>59</sup> Higginbotham writes, "[T]he politics of respectability assumed a fluid and shifting position along a continuum of African-American resistance. Through the discourse of respectability, the Baptist women emphasized manners and morals while simultaneously asserting traditional forms of protest, such as petitions, boycotts, and verbal appeals to justice." Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

<sup>60</sup> See Anthony Pinn, ed., *Making the Gospel Plain: The Writings of Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999); Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, "Faith of the American Negro" in *Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin [1971]; Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber, eds. *A Strange Freedom: Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, in a memorable speech, entitled, "The Faith of the American Negro," declared, "Since their Emancipation from slavery the masses of American Negroes have lived by the strength of simple but deeply moving faith. They have believed in the love and providence of a just and holy God; they have believed in the principles of democracy and in the righteous purpose of the Federal Government, and they have believed in the disposition of the American people as a whole and in the long run to be fair in all their dealings." Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, op. cit. 681.

<sup>61</sup> See Jeffery C. Goldfarb's excellent discussion in *Civility and Subversion: The Intellectual in Democratic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1. Although the example he cites is the disruptive public speech of Malcolm X, the civility practiced by King and the modern civil rights movement represents the epitome of civility as disruptive speech and action. In this sense, King is rightly depicted as a *bricoleur*. See Jeffery Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 74.

direct action. Stephen Carter makes a similar observation. According to Carter, King and other leaders in the Southern Leadership Conference were able "to spark a dialogue" through nonviolent acts of civility. The transformed nonconformist is primarily concerned with the disruption of "negative peace" as a way of bringing to surface hidden tensions that create the conditions for creative understanding and new discursive possibilities.<sup>62</sup>

Critical to this understanding of subversive civility is the practice of love or what King called "excessive altruism."<sup>63</sup> Excessive altruism is concretely expressed in acts of sympathy. It is to be distinguished from acts of pity that are general in application; rather sympathy is concerned with particularity. "Sympathy," writes King, "is fellow feeling for the person in need—his pain, agony and burdens." Sympathetic concern does not do something *for* others; rather it does something *with* others. It is only in this respect that the dignity and self-worth of others are preserved. Excessive altruism, therefore, goes beyond deontological decrees, universality as a criterion for duty, and uncritical compliance to law; it goes the "second mile." Therefore it cannot be enforced by external decrees, but is motivated by unenforceable, self-imposed sanctions.

King makes a distinction between enforceable and nonenforceable obligations. Enforceable obligations refer to moral demands (rules, laws, statutes) that are externally imposed, while unenforceable obligations refer to the inner sanctions of persons, which are self-imposed. Unenforceable laws "concern inner attitudes, genuine person-to-person relations, expressions of compassion which law books cannot regulate and jails cannot rectify."<sup>64</sup> Enforceable obligations are human laws that insure justice; unenforceable obligations belong to a higher law, rooted in the moral order of the cosmos, and they produce love.<sup>65</sup> Although behavior can be regulated by external

<sup>62</sup> King, "Love, Law and Disobedience," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 51. See also, King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," where he writes: "I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured." Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 295.

<sup>63</sup> King, "On Being A Good Neighbor," in *Strength to Love*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

decrees, King's view of civility as "excessive altruism" cannot be legislated. This was the logic of his argument against the limits of desegregation as an enforceable demand and integration as an unenforceable demand. "Desegregation will break down the legal barriers and bring men together physically, but something must touch the hearts and souls of men so that they come together spiritually because it is natural and right."<sup>66</sup>

Finally, King's brand of subversive civility was rooted in a profound sense of spirituality and a "searching ethical awareness."<sup>67</sup> Religion, for King, played a prominent role in sustaining the "negative peace" of the culture of conformity. In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King challenged the white religious leadership to imitate the example of the early Christian church by becoming "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." Black leadership was not exempt from King's scathing critique. Throughout his public career, King was a critic of the two extremes of emotionalism and classism that he felt plagued black church leadership. Some of King's severest critics were fellow black clergy and elites who saw him as a "disturber of the peace," especially in his decision to speak out against the Vietnam War.<sup>68</sup>

Leaders of the new century can take an important cue from King and leaders of the modern civil rights movement. The call for a new kind of subversive civility is echoed from many corridors as war escalates and violent acts of injustice are perpetrated through laws that silently exclude and relegate entire peoples to the margins. How might leaders who stand at the intersection where worlds collide maintain a disciplined, yet disruptive movement of presence without succumbing to the temptation to become physically violent and self-destructive in the process? The lessons of subversive civility represented by King and the civil rights movement may well be the

<sup>66</sup> King, "The Ethical Demands of for Integration," in James Melvin Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 124.

<sup>67</sup> Howard Thurman makes this observation in his eulogy of Martin Luther King, Jr. He stated, "Always he spoke from within the context of his religious experience, giving voice to the ethical insight which sprang out of his profound brooding over the meaning of his Judeo-Christian heritage. And this was indeed his great contribution to our times. He was able to put at the center of his own personal religious experience a searching ethical awareness. Thus organized religion as we know it in our society found itself with its back against the wall. To condemn him, to reject him, was to reject the ethical insight of the faith it proclaimed. And this was new. Racial prejudice, segregation, and discrimination were not regarded by him as merely un-American, undemocratic, but as a mortal sin against God. For those who were religious it awakens guilt; for those who are merely superstitious it inspires fear. And it was this fear that pulled the trigger of the assassin's gun that took his life." Howard Thurman, *A Strange Freedom*, 186.

<sup>68</sup> King, "A Knock at Midnight," in *Strength To Love*; King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"; and King, "A Time To Break Silence, in Washington," *A Testament of Hope*, 497-504, 289-302, 231-244.



salvation of American democracy if we have the courage to experiment with new forms of nonviolent dissent and resistance.

### *Community*

Considerable work has already been done on King's concept of community.<sup>69</sup> I am most interested in the final years of King's life and ministry (1964-1968). Although beleaguered with controversy and sabotage, these years are the most crucial in understanding the maturation of his spiritual and intellectual growth in respect to community. It is in this period that one sees most clearly King's own transformed nonconformity in his wrestling with nonviolence as a means of achieving human community, his increased realization of the international implications of his vision of community, his understanding of the nature and role of conflict (especially his courageous stance against the Vietnam War), and the place of hope in the realization of human community.<sup>70</sup> In the remainder of our discussion, I will focus on his legacy of hope as a critical insight for transformed nonconformists in the twenty-first century.

### TRANSFORMED NONCONFORMITY, THE LEGACY: HOPE AND COMMUNITY

The basis for the profound hope in King is found in the experience of transformed nonconformity. In his "Christmas Sermon on Peace" (1967), King spoke of the disparity between his dream of 1963 and his personal nightmare that evolved over the following four years:

Yes, I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hopes, but inspite of that I close today saying I still have a dream, because, you know, you can't give up on life. If you lose hope, somehow you lose that

<sup>69</sup> For Martin Luther King, Jr., community is the ideal that serves as the goal of human existence and the norm for ethical judgment; it is the mutually cooperative and voluntary venture of persons in which they realize the solidarity of humanity by freely assuming responsibility for one another within the context of civil relations. Community provides the context for the sensuous articulation of the values of love, justice, and courage as dynamic and interrelated constructs. The search for community was the defining motif of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and thought. From his early childhood until his death, there is a progression in his personal and intellectual understanding of the nature and goal of human existence, which he refers to as "the beloved community." The early development of the ideal of community in King reached its zenith in the march on Washington in 1963, but the following four and a half years proved to be a period in which his vision of community received its severest criticisms and challenges.

<sup>70</sup> Walter Earl Fluker, *They Looked for a City: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideal of Community In Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988).



vitality that keeps life moving, you lose the courage to be, that quality to go on inspite of all. And so today I still have a dream.<sup>71</sup>

Faces tell stories and disclose mysteries of character and being. The final *face* of King is the one we most remember—the somber, distant, almost melancholic look—a *disfigured countenance that returns from the mountain*. No place in King is this face more vividly portrayed than in his bold excoriation of the Vietnam War and in his trials within the African-American community around the political philosophy of black nationalism, articulated by Malcolm X. It is *the face of hope*. Professor James Cone suggests that Martin King's perspective on "racism, black empowerment and war led to a shift in emphasis and meaning regarding the themes of love, justice, and hope" which were operative concepts in his articulation of the beloved community.<sup>72</sup> The theme of hope, according to Cone, became "the shining center of Martin's thinking, revealing new interpretations of love and justice."<sup>73</sup> This shifting emphasis had significant implications for King's theological and spiritual perspectives surrounding the theological constructs of "exodus" and "exile." There is evidence in the later King that there was a movement toward an "exilic" metaphor as a way of understanding the "shifting" epistemic grounds for the liberative claims for African-Americans.

King's last speech is normally interpreted in light of the exodus paradigm. In that speech, King stands on the summit of the mountaintop and sees the "Promised Land." The "Promised Land" conjures up images of the conquest of Canaan, but a "shift" in lenses would offer a different reading. A closer examination of the substantive discourse in the speech reveals several levels of meaning. One is that King speaks out of a diasporic perspective. He begins his speech as a type of journey on which he takes a panoramic view of Western history. He calls his listeners to remember with him the long journey of Western civilization. He then locates himself in the latter half of the twentieth century in which there is a worldwide struggle for freedom. The exodus event is included as one instance in the long march of humanity toward freedom. The civil rights movement is situated in the broader context of a world movement that is taking place in America. This is a recurring theme throughout King beginning with his initial speech at Holt Baptist Church in 1955. The primary discursive note throughout the speech is the element of "hope." In the exile motif, the dominant existential category is

<sup>71</sup> King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in Washington, *Testament of Hope*, 257.

<sup>72</sup> Cone, *Martin & Malcom & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 235.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

"hope." What is the source and direction of this hope for King? A reading from within the exile paradigm favors the source of hope in the history of suffering peoples to create new meanings out of overwhelming oppression. The direction of the hope is toward a worldwide revolution. King viewed the boycott of the garbage workers in Memphis as part of a worldwide struggle for equality and freedom. This line of thinking points toward an exilic existence within the United States in the hope for a global eruption of freedom.

Before his tragic death in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded this nation that we no longer live in a small house, but rather we have inherited a world house of interrelatedness and interdependability. He suggested in clear and strident language that we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or die apart as fools. During his latter years, King was acutely aware of the need for a broader interpretive framework for understanding what he perceived as a crucial passage in history. He wrote that:

The civil rights movement in the United States is a special American phenomenon which must be understood in the light of American history and dealt with in terms of the American situation. But on another and more important level, what is happening in the United States today is a significant part of a world development.<sup>74</sup>

He further suggested that the struggles of African-Americans must be understood in light of a "shifting" of the West's basic outlooks and philosophical presuppositions about "power." King argued that indeed

We have inherited a large house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live together with each other in peace. However deeply American Negroes are caught in the struggle to be at last home in our homeland of the United States, we cannot ignore the larger world house in which we are also dwellers. Equality with whites will not solve the problems of either whites or Negroes if it means equality in a world society stricken by poverty and in a universe doomed to extinction by war.<sup>75</sup>

This dream of a "world house" has striking implications for the development of black church leaders as we prepare to meet the challenges of this

<sup>74</sup> King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, 169.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

century. Dr. King's prophetic insight of a global community is not quite the same as the "I Have A Dream" speech of 1963 of which many are so fond. That was a speech directed to the issue of the civil rights which African-Americans had been denied. But the notion of a "world house" places the struggle within the context of liberation movements throughout world. It implies that the freedom of African-Americans, our human rights, is inextricably bound with yearnings and hopes of oppressed people everywhere. King often reminded us that "injustice anywhere is against justice everywhere."

As we witness the shifting grounds of world change, leaders from historically marginalized communities must ask new questions about the nature and scope of our long, arduous journey on these shores. We must ask what does this new season of worldwide struggle mean for us, for this nation and the world? Who will lead? Dare we hope or must we conclude that we are at "the end of history?" King did not think we were at the end of history. King believed that what we are witnessing is a worldwide revolution that challenges the very foundations of Euro-western hegemony. In his last public sentences, King said that he was pleased to live during this chaotic and precarious age because beyond the despair and hopelessness that abounded, he believed that this was a great moment for the united struggles of people throughout the world. King said:

I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding—something is happening in our world. The masses of the people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee—the cry is always the same—"We want to be free."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>76</sup> King, "I See The Promised Land (3 April 1968)," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 280.

# What Is "Economic Theology"?

by ROBERT H. NELSON

*Robert H. Nelson, Professor in the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland, and author of Economics as Religion: from Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond (2001) delivered this keynote address at the Second Abraham Kuyper Consultation on "Theology and Economic Life: Exploring Hidden Links," in Erdman Hall on March 22, 2003.*

FOR THE PAST fifteen years, I have been writing on the subject of what I call "economic theology."<sup>1</sup> When I use this term, I often encounter the reaction that it seems an oxymoron. Economics is the science of the mundane, my questioners suggest, while theology is the study of the transcendent. Two areas of inquiry could not be more separate.

My first response is often to point out that I have a great deal of company in seeing economics as having a large theological dimension. One of the most distinguished theologians of the twentieth century, Paul Tillich, once wrote that an economist, Karl Marx, was "the most successful of all theologians since the Reformation."<sup>2</sup> Critics of the contemporary economics profession—many of them in the environmental movement—often say that it is "theological." Among a large number of examples that could be offered, Sallie McFague recently stated that the world needs to turn away from "the theology implied by the neoclassical model of economics. . . . The neoclassical model assumes that God, like the human being, is an individual—in fact, the superindividual who controls the world through laws of nature. This God is like a good mechanic."<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, few current economists think of their profession as connected to theology. When I attended economics graduate school at Princeton University in the late 1960s, none of my professors spoke in these terms.

<sup>1</sup> See Robert H. Nelson, *Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The Theological Meaning of Economics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); and Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2001). See also, for example, Robert H. Nelson, "Economic Religion versus Christian Values," *Journal of Markets and Morality* (October 1998); Robert H. Nelson, "Does 'Existence Value' Exist?: An Essay on Religions, Old and New," *The Independent Review* (March 1997); Robert H. Nelson, "Sustainability, Efficiency and God: Economic Values and the Sustainability Debate," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Volume 26 (1995); and Robert H. Nelson, "Economics as Religion," in H. Geoffrey Brennan and A.M.C. Waterman, eds., *Economics and Religion: Are They Distinct?* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1967), 476.

<sup>3</sup> Sallie McFague, "New House Rules: Christianity, Economics, and Planetary Living," *Daedalus* (Fall 2001), 8.

That does not mean, however, that theology was altogether absent. My thesis advisor, and the most influential member of the economics department in those days, was William Baumol. When Baumol was asked a while ago to explain why he had entered the economics profession, his response was that "I believe deeply with Shaw, that there are few crimes more heinous than poverty. Shaw as usual, exaggerated when he told us that money is the root of all evil, but he did not exaggerate by much."<sup>4</sup>

In the Bible, original sin in the Garden of Eden is of course the "root of all evil." In Baumol's new alternative form of theology, characteristic not only of George Bernard Shaw but many other progressives and socialists over the course of the twentieth century, there would be a new explanation for the presence of evil in the world. Economic deprivation, or the dire poverty in which human beings have lived for most of human history, has driven people to lie, cheat, steal and commit other evil acts.

If poverty is the true explanation for evil in the world, the economic success of the modern age has created a radical new possibility for human beings. If poverty—indeed, all economic deprivation—can be eliminated, it will be possible to "save the world" through human action alone. The biblical God will no longer be needed. Economic progress will eliminate the old divisions among human beings grounded in resource scarcities and lead us to a new heaven on earth. Indeed, John Maynard Keynes once wrote that rapid economic growth would "lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight." In the new world of the future, perhaps only 100 years away, as Keynes wrote in 1930, we shall finally be "free, at last, to discard" the uninhibited pursuit of self interest, the obsessive accumulation of capital, and other "distasteful and unjust" institutions of our present-day economic system.<sup>5</sup>

At the annual meetings of the American Economic Association, the Richard T. Ely Lecture is one of the most prestigious platforms in economics. Ely is remembered as the leading early American economist who in 1885 was a founder of the American Economic Association. Few economists today know much of this history but twenty of the fifty founding members of the AEA were former or practicing ministers. Ely was himself a leading member in the 1880s of the Social Gospel movement, better known at that time to the American public in this capacity than as an economist. Ely then argued that

<sup>4</sup> William J. Baumol, "On My Attitudes: Sociopolitical and Methodological," in Michael Szenberg, ed., *Eminent Economists: Their Life Philosophies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>5</sup> John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," (1930) in Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 369, 371–72.



economics departments should be located in theology schools. Although he regarded himself as a devout Christian, the Kingdom of Heaven for him was to be achieved in this world, not in the hereafter. As Ely would write, "Christianity is primarily concerned with this world, and it is the mission of Christianity to bring to pass here a kingdom of righteousness." As a "religious subject," the teachings of economics should provide the knowledge base for "a never-ceasing attack on every wrong institution, until the earth becomes a new earth, and all its cities, cities of God."<sup>6</sup>

The ideas of Ely and others in the American progressive movement (typically dated from 1890 to 1920) have been described by later historians as the "gospel of efficiency."<sup>7</sup> The attainment of higher and higher levels of efficiency was necessary to the economic progress that would lead to heaven on earth. At first the leading experts in efficiency were seen by progressive thinkers as the engineers and administrative scientists of society. With time, however, the key experts came to be seen as the members of the economics profession. As such, they had the essential knowledge to lead the way to a salvation in this world. The members of the economics profession (to be assisted by other social scientists) would become the new priesthood of the progressive American gospel, largely replacing both the Protestant ministry and Roman Catholic priesthood in the affairs of state.

### *A Hidden Theology*

A core theological purpose was thus explicit in the early days of the American Economic Association. The early founders of economics were part of the first wave of social scientists who were making the transition from the Protestant ministry to the social science professions. Another Princetonian, Woodrow Wilson, who studied political economy as a graduate student and later served as President of the American Political Science Association in its early years, was the son of a Presbyterian minister and was in his youth interested in entering the ministry. The transition would occur in two key stages. At first, the Christian trappings would remain, but the focus of a new Christianity, as in the Social Gospel movement, shifted from heaven in the hereafter to the attainment of a heaven right here on earth.

There was a deep tension present, however. True believers could be confident that economics would lead the way to heaven on earth because it

<sup>6</sup> Richard T. Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity and Other Essays* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1889), 15, 53, 73.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

was a “scientific” field of study, said to be capable of providing accurate scientific knowledge of the laws of economic growth and progress. But Christianity and science had often been at odds since at least the days of Galileo, and the discoveries of Charles Darwin had served to widen the separation. Economists also wanted to distance themselves from the internal disputes within Christianity and the old religious tensions with Jews and members of other religions. Hence, in a second stage, the outward appearance of Christianity was gradually abandoned altogether, as unnecessary to the whole enterprise.

New forms of secular religion—frequently one or another form of American progressivism—took the place of Christianity for many people. To be sure, the change in form was greater than the change in substance.<sup>8</sup> There was no God explicitly mentioned but in other respects the American secular religions of economic progress followed closely in the Christian (and Jewish) traditions. Like Christianity, history was seen linearly as a transition from a humble beginning to a final glorious end. During most of history, human beings had lived in sin and deprivation. A new age would soon be arriving, however, as human beings could be sure from the revelations of an authoritative priesthood. All men and women of good faith must work together for the looming salvation of the world, based on the good news recently and astonishingly revealed to mankind—now being delivered by the economic and other social scientific experts in the ways of economic progress.

Thus, as one historian writes, “the social gospel . . . was, in a sense, the religion of the progressive movement.”<sup>9</sup> Arthur Vidich and Sanford Lyman comment that leading social scientists were making a “shift from the old Social Gospel to the new statistical positivism.”<sup>10</sup> The University of Chicago economic historian Robert Fogel (winner of the Nobel prize in economics in 1993) has recently reinterpreted the history of the United States in terms of the influence of four “great awakenings.” The progressive era was the third of these periods of intense religious expression, a time when there emerged among many Americans “a modernist enthusiasm for the imminent realization of God’s kingdom on earth,” based on the “new doctrine that poverty was the source of sin”—and thus that the elimination of poverty could mean the elimination of sin in the world.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> This is a main theme of Nelson, *Reaching for Heaven on Earth*.

<sup>9</sup> Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General-Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought, 1865–1901* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 381.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur J. Vidich and Sanford M. Lyman, *American Sociology: Worldly Rejections of Religion and Their Directions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 134.

<sup>11</sup> Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 122, 124.

Dorothy Ross comments that progressive social scientists “still spoke in the idiom of Christian idealism” until World War I. The useless death of eight million people on the battlefields of Europe then dealt progressive optimism a blow from which it would never fully recover. World War I marked the end of the third Great Awakening and the American progressive era.

### *The Economic Priesthood Today*

A graduate student in economics is not required to study the history of the economics profession. I learned about it only long after I had completed my Ph.D. at Princeton. However, historians and other researchers in noneconomic fields have explored the origins of American professionalism, including economics, in great detail.<sup>12</sup> As they have shown, the rise of the economics profession was closely linked to a wider professionalization of American life and other important political developments of the progressive era.<sup>13</sup> For the students of the early years of American social science, little that I have said above would be either new or controversial.

I will turn now to a more novel argument. I assert, and here I have much less company than before, that little has changed in the economics profession to the present day. That is to say, economists are still the modern priests of economic progress. Many of them still believe, like my Princeton advisor William Baumol, that the elimination of economic deprivation will lead to a great improvement in the human condition, morally as well as materially. That is a main reason in many cases for entering the field of economics. The role of economists as the pre-eminent profession among the social sciences is justified by economists' possession of the key scientific knowledge required to bring about a modern heaven on earth.

In support of this argument, it is possible to find additional revealing quotes, similar to those of Keynes and Baumol above. The economist Robert Mundell (a Nobel prize winner in 1999) recently argued that, if economic policy had been handled more scientifically, and as one can hope it will be in the future, “there would have been no Great Depression, no Nazi revolution, no World War II.”<sup>14</sup> A better application of economic knowledge, in short,

<sup>12</sup> See Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); John Rutherford Everett, *Religion in Economics: A Study of John Bates Clark, Richard T. Ely and Simon N. Patten* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1982—first ed. 1946); and Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressive's Achievement in American Civilization, 1889–1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> Michael A. Bernstein, *A Perilous Progress: Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> R. A. Mundell, “A Reconsideration of the Twentieth Century,” *American Economic Review* (June 2000), 327, 331.

can prevent the kinds of horrible events that occurred in the world in the first half of the twentieth century.

Another leading economist, Charles Schultze, argues that economists serving in government should not be value neutral—in fact, this would be impossible—but should serve as “partisan advocates for efficiency.” That is to say, economists should work diligently as partisan advocates for the economic policy measures that will in the end lead to a secular salvation of the world.<sup>15</sup> Earlier Christian priesthoods advised governments on the commandments of a biblical God; the economics profession today advises on the necessary efficiency steps on the path of economic progress, the reigning faith of our day. In the daily affairs of government, the terms “efficient” and “inefficient” during the twentieth century became the operative substitutes for “good” and “evil.” In the traditional Christian understanding, an evil act is something that distances a person from God—and in the twentieth century a distancing from economic progress became the new basis for the making of moral judgments.

Paul Samuelson’s famous introductory textbook, *Economics*, is now in its 16<sup>th</sup> edition (with Yale economist William Nordhaus as a co-author in more recent editions). The first edition appeared in 1948 and was the model for many other introductory textbooks in economics in the years to come. From the first edition, Samuelson advertised *Economics* as a value-neutral study of a technical field. Yet, it is more appropriate to regard *Economics* as a new “bible” of economic theology, dominant in this role for the next few decades following World War II.

In *Economics*, the new understanding of good and evil of economic theology can be found in many passages. Whenever a political or economic institution infringed on the efficiency of the economic system, Samuelson was surprisingly prone to make an explicit moral judgment—indeed, to state directly that this result was “evil.” Thus, monopoly pricing results in a “wastage of resources” which for Samuelson puts it in the category of the genuine “economic evils” of society. On another occasion, Samuelson says that “competitive advertising” is economically “wasteful,” creating yet another of the unfortunate “evils” that continue to distort the efficient functioning of the American economic system.<sup>16</sup> Economic progress will lead to heaven on earth and a morally upright person will do everything possible to avoid creating any obstacles to this wonderful outcome.

<sup>15</sup> Charles L. Schultze, “The Role and Responsibilities of the Economist in Government,” *American Economic Review* (May 1982), 62.

<sup>16</sup> Paul A. Samuelson, *Economics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 127, 602. (McGraw-Hill reprinted the original *Economics* to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.)



Other evidence in support of my thesis is found in the behavior of many economists. Some individual economists such as Milton Friedman have shown an obvious messianic character. His fellow economist at the University of Chicago, Gary Becker, has written approvingly that throughout his career Friedman exhibited "a missionary's zeal in the worship of truth," dedicated to the improvement of public policy.<sup>17</sup> The former Harvard economist, Albert Hirschman, has written of the actions of American economists—some of the most influential also found at Harvard—who sought to spread Keynesian economics in the aftermath of World War II. These Keynesians functioned as "a band of sect-like initiates and devotees." Driven by "an exhilarating feeling of possessing the key to truth," they undertook with great energy and commitment to "spread the message" and "to preach their gospel to a variety of as yet unconverted natives"—not only in the United States but throughout the world.<sup>18</sup>

I have known many economists personally over my thirty-five years as a member of the economics profession. Most of them, I am happy to say, have been hard working and dedicated to the improvement of public policy. Belonging to the economics profession creates a sense of common bonds and solidarity. It is in fact a lot like belonging to a priesthood.

In his remembrance for the Chicago economist Harry Johnson, Edward Shils noted that, even though Johnson died before he was 55, he produced twenty books and 525 articles. Shils relates the story of encountering Johnson still working at his hospital bed in Italy, after suffering a stroke. For Johnson, "economic analysis" was not merely a practical tool but something he "believed in" in a fundamental way. The study of economics was essential to his basic "intellectual integrity" in the pursuit of the truth. Indeed, like other saints, Johnson "gave his life" to this cause; Shils relates that Johnson himself considered it all part of his "missionary" commitment in life.<sup>19</sup>

Many economists thus do not behave like the economic maximizers of their own models. It is true that a university life as an academic economist offers a decent salary, a great deal of personal freedom, and the opportunity to enjoy intellectual pursuits. But most of the economists I have known—especially the top economists who are the leaders of the profession—work much too hard to take full advantage of the opportunities for personal

<sup>17</sup> Gary Becker, "Milton Friedman," in Edward Shils, ed., *Remembering the University of Chicago: Teachers, Scientists, and Scholars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 145–146.

<sup>18</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, "How Keynes Was Spread from America," *Challenge* (November/December 1988), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Shils, "Harry Johnson," in Shils, ed., *Remembering the University of Chicago*, 201, 209.



enjoyment and pleasure. Given their talents, and if they worked so diligently, they could make much more money on Wall Street or in other business pursuits. Many—perhaps most—of them, I submit, have chosen to enter the profession of economics because they had a basic commitment to economic progress as the essential route of the common good.

When I entered economics graduate school in 1966, that was my own view. It was also, I believe, the view of many of my Princeton professors, even though few of them had any great interest in formally discussing such subjects. The central importance of economic progress to society was considered so obvious in those days that there was no real need to talk about it (now that environmentalists and others often attack economists—sometimes on explicitly theological grounds—this circumstance has changed somewhat).<sup>20</sup>

### *"Illegitimate" Costs*

An economist would say that my evidence of an important theological element in economics is thus far "anecdotal." It is far from meeting any standard of "proof," as an economist would expect to see a formal analysis developed. If the arguments thus far have been "soft," I propose next to make a "hard" argument. My claim is the following: Without certain theological assumptions, some of the most important conclusions of economic theory could not be sustained. It is as though a mathematician had developed the proof of a theorem in which some of the key steps in the proof had been left out. On close inspection, moreover, the omitted steps in this case turn out to have a special feature—they are theological in character. Their omission, I further submit, reflects an implicit understanding among economists that these steps can not be defended in "scientific" terms, and an unwillingness to defend them explicitly in theological terms.

Economists almost universally argue that a market system leads to an efficient allocation of resources. In making this argument, they compare one

<sup>20</sup> There may also have been a loss of economic faith among economists themselves. An economist today may be more likely to declare him- or herself "agnostic" with respect to economic progress. More economists today may say that they simply do economics as an "intellectual puzzle" or "mental game." The idea that consumer demands may be insatiable—contrary to the core assumption of economic religion—is also probably held more widely today among economists (perhaps as a result of the empirical observation that the extraordinary growth of incomes in the United States seems to have done little to curb the appetite for more goods and services). Although these views may be more widespread among current economists, the potentially radical consequences have not been much explored. I submit that, if the wider society came to share these views, or to realize that many economists hold such views, the current privileged role of economic professionals in American society might well be endangered.

equilibrium state of the economy with another—the approach of “comparative statics.” The “efficient” states of the economy are characterized by the condition that it would be impossible to make any change to improve the welfare of one party without damaging the welfare of another party. So far, there is nothing theological here.

However, if we are not at present at an efficient state of the economy, it will be necessary to move from our current position. This movement will itself involve real transitional costs. In deriving the central theoretical and policy conclusions of economics, these transitional costs are ignored—in effect treated as nonexistent. For example, if a new and more efficient firm moves into a market and displaces another firm, the owner of the losing firm will very likely suffer some significant burdens, both financially and in many cases emotionally. Economics recognizes the financial side of this but usually does not enter it into the calculations of social welfare. It ignores the potentially large emotional burdens altogether. As an economics graduate student, you are taught to ignore—to treat as zero—these kinds of costs. If they were actually given full account, it would be impossible to say in principle whether a market system is economically efficient or not.

In the real world, however, large resources are used up and other transitional costs incurred in moving towards new equilibria (of course, we never actually get there and are constantly in motion towards new destinations). From a strictly scientific viewpoint, these costs demand some accounting. Why should they be implicitly treated as zero, as the main corpus of economic theory does? One might argue that they are small and thus need not be included in the analysis—as friction is typically ignored in working out the laws of physics. However, economists make no effort to offer evidence that this “economic friction” is in fact inconsequential. A priori, to me at least, it seems likely that the costs of economic transitions will be large. The big losers in the economic system are likely to feel bruised and battered—at least for the length of a “healing period” that could last a very long time.

I submit that the true answer—the only good explanation in fact for making such a strong assumption—is theological. Economists justify their strong assumptions with respect to transitional costs by saying that they are concerned only with “the long run.” In the long run, as the message of economic theology tells us, a continuing high rate of economic growth will lead us to a new heaven on earth. Taking account of “short run” costs may improve the welfare of many people for a limited time—even the welfare of some people over their full lifetimes—but it will also delay the perfection of the economic system and thus the arrival of heaven on earth. Anything that stands in the way of the salvation of the world must not be given recognition

and legitimacy—as the way of thinking of the economics profession normally does not give transitional costs any accounting.<sup>21</sup>

It is thus our religious duty as followers in the economic faith not to halt new technologies or to block other steps towards greater economic efficiency that might in fact displace large numbers of people. It would be an economic “sin” to stand in the way of progress. The sinful act will be all the more offensive when it serves to benefit privately one or another “special interest.” The world of politics is in particular likely to be filled with such motives; although it will be difficult, the economic priesthood thus must be ever vigilant in seeking to hold politicians accountable to the commandments of a higher economic god. In earlier times, I might note, the Christian church was similarly often required to seek to contain the “wayward” impulses of kings and other political leaders who were all too willing to ignore a higher set of divine commands.

In Christianity through most of its history, the events of the world were to be regarded as trivial, at least as compared with the attainment of a heaven in the hereafter. A pleasure of the moment might be a great temptation to sin but no person would rationally endanger his or her eternal soul for a fleeting moment of satisfaction. So it is today with economic theology; the faithful must not lose sight of the glorious destination in the future, even as they are tempted by “politicians” and others who offer short run pleasures and other diversions from the long run goal. In short, there may not be any good scientific reasons but there are sound theological reasons—from the perspective of economic theology—to pay no heed to the large stresses and strains of economic transitions along the road of progress.

Leading economists have in recent years acknowledged that, as a matter of science alone, there are severe technical problems with Samuelson’s static framework of economic analysis. Indeed, a former MIT student of Samuelson, Joseph Stiglitz (winner of the Nobel prize in economics in 2001), comments that a new understanding has developed among his generation of economists of how “the analysis of how the economy allocates its resources is far more complicated, and far more interesting, than the engineering

<sup>21</sup> It is true that a “new institutional economics” has emerged since the 1970s that focuses on the central role of one form of transitional costs—“transaction costs” in the language of economics—in shaping economic institutions. However, the most powerful policy conclusions of economics still require an initial assumption of perfect knowledge and perfect information (i.e., zero transaction costs)—the old neoclassical assumptions. Without these assumptions, economists might have to confess that they have “little to say” about many central questions in economics. Few economists have taken this radical step, even as they have been publishing more and more academic journal articles about the large economic complications introduced by considerations of transactions costs.

approach that prevailed in the decades following Samuelson's *Foundations of Economic Analysis*"—an approach that was offered in a simplified, non-mathematical form in Samuelson's introductory textbook, *Economics*.<sup>22</sup> By focusing only on equilibrium states of the economy, it was possible for economists to ignore issues of the availability and production of information that inevitably must be central to the workings of the economy in a more dynamic setting. As Stiglitz has stated,

The competitive paradigm [of *Economics* and other similar if more technical works] not only did not provide much guidance on the vital question of the choice of economic systems but what "advice" it did provide was often misguided. The conceptions of the market that underlay that analysis mischaracterized it; the standard analyses underestimated the strengths—and weaknesses—of market economies, and accordingly provided wrong signals for the potential success of alternatives and for how the market might be improved upon.

The fundamental problem with the neoclassical model [is that it fails] . . . to take into account a variety of problems that arise from the absence of perfect information and the costs of acquiring information, as well as the absence or imperfections in certain key risk and capital markets.<sup>23</sup>

The writings of Stiglitz and other "new institutional economists" have significantly undermined the intellectual foundations of economics as Samuelson and other leading economists had portrayed the field for many years.<sup>24</sup> It is not that they have shown that these older economists were making any serious errors of logic or gross failures of reasoning. Indeed, many of them were skilled in the use of mathematics and such errors would have been most unlikely. Rather, they have shown that the assumptions made by the economists of Samuelson's day were so far from reality as to be economically "uninteresting." An economic analysis based on these assumptions could not illuminate the central economic questions that the members of the economics profession are expected to answer.

However, the assumptions were more interesting theologically. By assuming an enormously simplified world of perfect information and perfect equilibrium, the economic models in effect made a strong statement that transi-

<sup>22</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Wither Socialism?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 201.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> See Eirik G. Furubotn and Rudolf Richter, *Institutions and Economic Theory: The Contribution of the New Institutional Economics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).



tional costs were of no great consequence to society. Samuelson's *Economics* may have been gravely flawed in terms of its scientific understanding of the economy but as a work of religious art it worked much better. Symbolically, the powerful message was effectively communicated that the long run was the only object of real concern. In the long run, in which a "perfect equilibrium" would be achieved, guided by the knowledge of modern economics, there would be a new heaven on earth.

### *Economic Commandments*

There are other heroic assumptions in economic reasoning that most economists have not thought it necessary to defend. The basic framework of economic analysis assumes that human welfare is a product of the consumption of goods and services alone. Other matters, such as the institutional arrangements of the economy that produce those goods and services, for example, are not to be included among the key matters that influence the welfare—economically speaking, the level of "utility"—of individuals. Thus, the use of interest rates as a device for rationally allocating the use of capital is not in itself considered as having any impact on the sense of well being of the members of society. This is a very strong assumption, however, in light of the deep moral disapproval of "usury" for most of the history of western civilization—an attitude that still exists today in parts of the Islamic world.

Economists, of course, are well aware that usury historically has been prohibited in many societies. They reject such old attitudes not as a matter of rebutting the historical facts but as a matter of introducing "modern" attitudes that are not based on "superstition" and that take only "legitimate" factors of production into account. In *Economics*, Samuelson thus writes dismissively of anyone who would treat usury as "a philosophical question" that might be answered by studying "what Aristotle had to say about it." Rather, for Samuelson the question of usury "simply boils down to" the important practical role that interest rates must play in bringing the demand for capital into equilibrium with the supply of capital.<sup>25</sup>

Medieval Christians, as one might say, saw usury in light of the commandments of a biblical God; Samuelson now sees usury in light of the commandments of an economic god. The reality is that there are two forms of religious value judgment here, although Samuelson claimed the exclusive authority of "scientific truth" for the ethical commands of his god. Without the use of interest rates, the economy would perform poorly and the rate of economic

<sup>25</sup> Samuelson, *Economics* (1948 edition), 482.



progress would be significantly diminished, impeding the salvation of the world—ample grounds for consigning the old attitudes about usury to the historical dustbin.

Samuelson is equally dismissive of more recent “reactionary beliefs” such as the old thinking that “that government governs best which governs least.” Writing in 1948, he is contemptuous of Friedrich Hayek (who would win the Nobel prize in economics in 1974, four years after Samuelson received his prize), declaring that “no immutable ‘wave of the future’ washes us down ‘the road to serfdom.’”<sup>26</sup> Samuelson here makes yet another powerful value judgment. If there is a conflict between economic liberty and economic efficiency, the efficiency considerations must trump the liberty considerations. Again, there is nothing scientific about Samuelson’s view in this respect—which is admittedly shared by most other economists. Science in itself does not reveal anything about whether economic growth is more or less important than individual freedom.

Rather, Samuelson is affirming the message of economic theology which tells us that economic progress is the correct route to the salvation of the world. Abolishing economic scarcity will abolish sin. And Samuelson is of the view that an undue emphasis on liberty might impede the rate of economic growth. The degree of efficiency, by contrast, is the operative measure of the contribution of an economic action to the advance of progress—and thus in this framework must logically command the highest obedience of all, superseding other matters such as liberty.

Samuelson makes other powerful value judgments throughout his economic analysis. Indeed, like many other economists of his generation, Samuelson was very much a product of the values of American progressivism. Whatever his frequent claims to being value neutral, the progressive “gospel of efficiency” lay just below the surface of his work. Like other progressives, Samuelson sought to advance the “scientific management” of American society. This depended on the existence of a powerful government to oversee the application of scientific knowledge. Any undue deference to property rights might well crimp the efforts of economic and other social science professionals, the legitimate social engineers of American life.

It is an ideology—a theology—of tight social control by a new priesthood of experts. Society is like a well crafted computer or other finely tuned machine. Even when advocating the old fashioned pursuit of self interest in the market place, as he does for ordinary goods and services, Samuelson introduces a new “scientific” way of describing all this—the socially engi-

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

neered "use of the market mechanism," spurning any use of the old laissez faire terminology of "the free market."

Samuelson, of course, had a great deal of progressive company.<sup>27</sup> Progressive ideas created the intellectual foundation for the development of the American welfare and regulatory state of the twentieth century. American universities in those days were filled with the heirs to the progressive tradition. Very large numbers of ordinary Americans in fact "believed in" the goal of economic progress as a matter of their own basic faith. Samuelson did not create this faith but his work and that of other economists served to ratify and affirm it. These economists gave it a new symbolic and rhetorical expression. Whatever the deficiencies as science, these efforts of economists did in fact work very well for a time as a form of modernist religious art. It is possible to draw compelling pictures with a mathematical brush as well as the kind used by Picasso.

To be sure, Samuelson, and many others like him, defended the "gospel of efficiency" as a matter of scientific truth. Christianity is a monotheistic religion; there can not be plural religious "truths." The Greeks may have had multiple gods fighting on Mt. Olympus but the one God of Christianity is omniscient and omnipotent. As in other respects, economic theology has followed in the path of Christianity. If only one truth were possible, the methods of science alone were capable of revealing an exclusive route to economic progress in the modern age. Samuelson and his generation converted the entire economics profession to the emulation of modern physics and chemistry—a style of doing economics that continues to the present day. Indirectly, these claims to a scientific status have been a way of saying that the economics priesthood possesses the one valid understanding of the correct path of the salvation of the world.

Nevertheless, as noted above, the verdict of Stiglitz and many other leading economists today is that Samuelson failed scientifically. As a theologian, however, he was a much greater success. His bible of *Economics*, and its

<sup>27</sup> The premises of economic theology were shared widely among the other social sciences including psychology and sociology. The American psychologist, Erich Fromm, for example, declared in 1947 that: "A spirit of pride and optimism has distinguished Western culture in the last few centuries. . . . Man's pride has been justified. By virtue of his reason he has built a material world the reality of which surpasses even the dreams and visions of fairy tales and utopias. He harnesses physical energies which will enable the human race to secure the material conditions necessary for a dignified and productive existence, and although many of his goals have not yet been attained there is hardly any doubt that they are within reach and *the problem of production*—which was the problem in the past—is, in principle, solved." See Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York: Rinehart, 1947), quoted in Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 5.

many textbook imitators and other related writings, dominated the thinking of the American intellectual world about the proper workings of the economic system for several decades. If the conclusions of his economic "science" depended on a host of matters of faith, the invocation of scientific authority served effectively to give these particular faith claims a special place in the American halls of power.

Presidents and members of Congress indeed routinely listened to the members of the economic priesthood, leaving the priesthoods of old to deliver Sunday morning sermons, to officiate at marriages and funerals, and to fulfil other "traditional" functions. Traditional Christian religion, in the words of the contemporary theologian Richard John Neuhaus, was effectively excluded from "the public square" for many of the years after *Economics* was first published in 1948.<sup>28</sup>

### *America as a Church*

Thus far, my comments concerning economic theology have addressed mainly the implicit theological contents of some economic arguments and the internal sociology of the economics profession. I propose now to visit further, if briefly, a broader sociological arena—the practical role that economists play in the workings of the American economy and society.

The political task of holding together a nation as large as the United States is bound to be a great challenge. It is compounded by the fact that America is a nation of immigrants from all over the world. A nation such as Japan is bound together by common bonds of ethnic origin that go back millennia. In this country, lacking any such ties, it is ideas and beliefs that must hold the United States together as a national community. For much of American history, they were the ideas of a Protestant clergy. With a much more diverse immigrant mix, and with the authority of Protestantism under challenge from modern scientific influences, the central unifying ideas in the twentieth century would have to come from new sources of orthodoxy—from secular forms of religion. The progressive era not only initiated the American welfare and regulatory state but also was the decisive moment when the unifying religion of American no longer said anything explicitly about God.

Almost every society in the history of the world, from ancient to modern, has had a priesthood. Since the religious claims of these priesthoods are often in conflict, and yet most of them appear to have been important to the functioning of their societies, it is evident that the practical usefulness of a

<sup>28</sup> See *First Things*, edited by Richard John Neuhaus; Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

religion and of a priesthood can be assessed independently of the exclusive "truthfulness" of the religious message. A belief that is widely held can for this reason alone can be a powerful instrument of social stability and harmony, and indeed of economic advance.

As the priesthood of the church of economic progress in America, the economics profession has thus had an important practical role—if having little to do with the quality of expert economic understanding and advice itself—in the workings of American society. If every opinion were equal, social and intellectual chaos would ensue. In matters of traditional Jewish and Christian religion, however, the twentieth-century tendency was to regard matters of religious belief as determined by "subjective judgment"—that is to say, every opinion is equal. It was thus important that a common church of America should be grounded in a more exclusive claim to authority.

Whatever one might say today of the genuine "truth value" of economics as a body of scientific understanding, the practical reality is that the economics profession for many years was successful in asserting its scientific status. The economic priesthood could effectively police the theological territory of America. Modern America fortunately no longer burns its heretics but economic censors functioned almost as effectively to dismiss the policy ideas of the many "cranks" always seeking to press their ideas in the policy arena.

### *The Market Paradox*

A central problem for any society that seeks to advance economically (as most do, even when economic progress may not be their ultimate religion), and as I describe it in my recent book *Economics as Religion*, is the "market paradox."<sup>29</sup> The workings of the market are, I have no doubt, the most powerful instrument of economic advance ever conceived by human beings. As everyone knows, the market is based on the pursuit of self-interest. However, the very success of a market economic system depends on the existence of powerful restraints on self-interest as well. If there is too much lying and cheating among market participants, if there is too much "rent seeking" in politics, if too many judges can be bought off, the market will lose much of its advantage. If it was possible to ignore such issues in the past, recent developments in the former Soviet Union and the rise of a governing kleptocracy over much of Africa have served to remind us of these realities.

For a society seeking a significant increase in the standard of living, there needs, therefore, to be a legitimate pursuit of self-interest in some domains

<sup>29</sup> See the Introduction to Nelson, *Economics as Religion*.



of society but self-interest should be illegitimate in others. Economic theology, as preached by Samuelson and other economists, filled the bill—again sociologically speaking. Samuelson advocated a market system but assumed that economists and other professionals would oversee the workings of the market. The economic priesthood would have the responsibility to engineer “the market mechanism.” Moreover, economists themselves would not be guided by an ethos of self interest. Rather, the social obligation of an economic professional, like a member of a priesthood of old, would be to serve “the public interest” (as progressives had rechristened the “common good”). Other professions in other areas of society—such as public administration in government—would similarly be guided by the social service ethic of a priesthood, as opposed to the self-interested ethic of a market. If the positions of high command in society were all filled with narrowly self-seeking individuals, the overall results would obviously be disastrous.

Many—perhaps most—societies have failed to resolve the market paradox. In most of them, the uninhibited pursuit of self-interest is regarded as ethically offensive, even in commercial areas, and the role of the market is tightly circumscribed. In my opinion, the results are often quite undesirable. Despite some failings, and perhaps a superficial approach to ultimate religion, the daily conduct of ordinary life in America in the twentieth century was much more pleasant than the lives of most people during most of human history. Indeed, most of human history is the record of social disorders and a painful struggle for a mere physical survival.

As a practical matter, and whatever their deficiencies as “real” theologians, the efforts of the members of the American economics profession (along with other social scientists) have helped in averting this fate. The economists of Samuelson’s generation preached a dual ethic of self-interest in the market and professional service to society in government and other domains. The heyday of progressive economic theology may have passed (a bit more on that later) but American society should perhaps express a debt of gratitude for the past services of American economists in this special priestly role—resolving the market paradox for the United States—in the twentieth century. Economists may have been theologically shallow in some fundamental sense but their simplistic forms of theology worked rather well in practical economic terms. Ironically enough, to be sure, it was as theologians, rather than economic scientists, that the members of the American economics profession actually made their greatest practical contributions to the successful workings of the American economic system. They provided a necessary unifying ethic to hold together the otherwise very diverse members of the great church of America.



Economists are also in my experience capable of demonstrating high practical skills in the affairs of society, often unrelated to their formal academic work. More economists have been cabinet officers than any other profession except the law. Although Princeton University now has a new president, the previous president of Princeton and the current presidents of Harvard and Yale are all professional economists. Part of the practical success of economists in worldly affairs derives from their mastery of the language and rituals of the core economic religion of America. It also derives from their pragmatic awareness of the limitations of economic "science" in the real world, and their practical ability to find workable solutions. In short, among other important sociological roles, American economics has produced a disproportionate share of the top leadership of American society.

### *Creating Social Capital*

I am not, I am happy to report, entirely alone in making many of the arguments I have developed thus far, odd as they may well seem to many current economists (and perhaps to theologians as well). A number of social scientists in recent years have emphasized the importance of "social capital" to the effective workings of society—politically, economically, and otherwise. It is an economic element emphasized in the writings of the economic historian Douglass C. North (winner of the Nobel prize in 1993).<sup>30</sup> A particularly effective contributing factor in generating a high level of social capital can be the common bonds of a shared religion. It seems that a powerful religion in a society can be economically "efficient," and this desirable quality can be altogether independent of the actual religious "truth value" of the faith.

The Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam has been among the most influential in making such arguments. Employing various methods of statistical analysis, Putnam found that different levels of social capital largely explained the divergent economic results in northern Italy and southern Italy. Throughout Italy, the presence or absence of civic commitment could go far to explain the level of "norms of generalized reciprocity and networks of civic engagement [that] encourage social trust and cooperation because they reduce incentives to defect, reduce uncertainty, and provide models for future cooperation." Startling as it was for any true believer in economic religion to hear, Putnam found that it was initial trust that produced later economic success, not a healthy economy that produced a later climate of trust. As

<sup>30</sup> See Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Putnam reported, in Italy “the contemporary [strong] correlation between civics and economics reflects primarily the impact of civics on economics, not the reverse.”<sup>31</sup> It seems that a good religion may be necessary for a good economy.<sup>32</sup>

Chesterton once remarked that the United States is “a nation with the soul of a church.”<sup>33</sup> In America, following Putnam, we might conclude that the economic success of this nation is attributable in significant part to a very high level of social capital, based on the bonds of a powerful shared national faith. In the twentieth century, that common faith revolved around the twin convictions I have been describing—that sin is a product of material deprivation, and that economic progress will finally end material shortages, and thus bring a new heaven to earth. If the early Puritans saw Massachusetts as a “city on a hill” offering a Christian beacon for all mankind, twentieth century America was the place where modern economic progress achieved its greatest triumphs as another form of beacon for the world.

### *Conclusion: The Future of the University*

As suggested above, however, the time of American economic religion may be fading. Much as I have argued above, the Nobel economist Robert Fogel suggests in his recent book *The Fourth Great Awakening* that “a secular class of experts has usurped the monopoly that theologians once had” on the contents of public life in America.<sup>34</sup> Fogel thinks that our current period represents the fourth of his great awakenings. For him the genuine shortages in our day—the key scarce resource at present in producing human happi-

<sup>31</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 155–57, 178.

<sup>32</sup> One of the signs of changing times is a new interest among American economists in the potential economic importance of religion. In a 2003 paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Harvard economists Robert Barro and Rachel McCleary note that “empirical research on the determinants of economic growth has typically neglected the influence of religion.” However, they are now engaged in efforts to fill the gap. Based on some initial tentative investigations, they develop statistical correlations (“regression analyses” in a more technical language) which find that “increases in some religious beliefs—notably in hell, heaven, and an after-life—tend to increase economic growth. There is also some indication that the stick represented by the fear of hell is more potent for growth than the carrot from the prospect of hell.” Barro and McCleary do not include secular religions within their studies and thus do not consider the possibility that “economic theology” may have the most powerful effects on economic outcomes of any religion. See Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, *Religion and Economic Growth*, Working Paper 9682 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2003), Abstract and 36.

<sup>33</sup> Observation of G. K. Chesterton, quoted in Michael Novak, “The Nation with the Soul of a Church,” in Richard J. Bishirjian, ed., *A Public Philosophy Reader* (New York: Arlington House, 1978), 92.

<sup>34</sup> Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening*, 72.

ness—are no longer economic. They are now spiritual. I think that Fogel is largely correct in the following views, which amount to an announcement of the pending demise of economic theology.

Failure to recognize the enormous *material* gains of the last [20<sup>th</sup>] century, even for the poor, impedes rather than advances the struggle in rich nations against chronic poverty, whose principal characteristic [now] is the spiritual estrangement from the mainstream society of those so afflicted. . . . The proposition that material improvement would ennoble the masses, so widely embraced by modernist reformers, did more to promote the consumerism of the 1920s and 1930s than to produce spiritual regeneration. . . . Realization of the potential of an individual is not something that can be legislated by the state, nor can it be provided to the weak by the strong. It is something that must develop within each individual on the basis of a succession of choices. . . . The quest for spiritual equity [among the members of society] thus turns not so much on money as on access to spiritual assets, most of which are transferred and developed privately rather than through the market. . . . Some of the most critical spiritual assets [are] . . . a sense of purpose, self-esteem, a sense of discipline, a vision of opportunity, and a thirst for knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

Although Fogel does not characterize his efforts in these terms, he is writing in such passages as a theologian as well as an economist—as a contributor, as I would say, to “economic theology.” The old progressive economics was also concerned with spiritual themes, believing that spiritual advancement was the product of economic advance. Fogel, along with many others outside economics, has now come to believe that some of the main sources of individual growth and well-being actually lie elsewhere. The economic god is yet another in a long list of false gods in history. The God of the Bible does not make things easy; he apparently enjoys testing the Christian faithful with numerous temptations to false truths and idols.

It is not as though economics is becoming altogether irrelevant, however. The new view is perhaps aptly characterized by the economic journalist Robert Samuelson (no relation to Paul): “Prosperity is a necessary—but not sufficient—condition for solving most serious social problems.”<sup>36</sup> The inability of prosperity alone to solve the problems of society has been a painful lesson learned by the generation that was born after World War II; as

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3–4.

<sup>36</sup> Robert J. Samuelson, “It’s Not the Economy, Stupid,” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1994, A19.

(Robert) Samuelson writes, "every age has its illusions. Ours has been this fervent belief in the power of prosperity. Our pillars of faith are now crashing about us."<sup>37</sup>

A great university such as Princeton has been created to teach the truths of human existence. For much of its history, those truths were Christian—specifically in the case of Princeton they were Presbyterian. Theology was once central to the curriculum, reflecting the essential place of Christian teachings in the understanding of human nature and society, and ultimately the meaning of history. Like most American universities, and influenced by the powerful modernist trends that swept through American society in the progressive era, Princeton reorganized itself in those days to become the current university of social science and engineering departments and professional schools (along with some remaining humanities).

In such ways, Princeton abandoned the Christian framework that had dominated its first century and a half. The teaching of Christian religion was no longer part of the core mission of Princeton and was left to yet another professional school, Princeton Theological Seminary. It was only superficially true, however, that Princeton University had abandoned a core religious mission. It is more correct to say that Princeton turned from one religious mission to another.<sup>38</sup>

However, if Fogel (and I of course agree with him) is correct in his assessment of our fourth great awakening, much of the structure of the modern apparatus of social science will soon be fading. At Princeton today, for example, leading economists seek to answer questions such as: "how much more income would result from a greater level of capital investment or from a new improvement in the quality of the labor force?" Deprived of the transcendent importance of economics, such questions would no longer be of major intellectual interest. They were extraordinarily important in the twentieth century—both symbolically and practically—because the application of economic knowledge was an essential element in saving the world. But without the theological justification, there is little reason to include them in the curriculum of a world class university that must in the end be devoted to the pursuit of the fundamental truths of the world. The practice of economics, as Keynes famously said, should in the long run (Keynes foresaw about 100 years which would bring us to 2030) become more like the practice of dentistry. And Princeton does not have a dental school!

<sup>37</sup> Robert J. Samuelson, "How Our American Dream Unraveled," *Newsweek*, March 2, 1992, 32.

<sup>38</sup> George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the religious mission of Princeton University may change again; it may turn away from the economic gospel of efficiency towards more old fashioned forms of theological inquiry. Theology has always been about the most fundamental questions that human beings have occasion to think about. What is the meaning of human existence? What is the relationship of humanity and nature? Where is the history of human beings on earth leading? As intelligent and intellectually curious individuals, Princeton students today no doubt learn quite a bit about these subjects, but perhaps more by accident than in the explicit content of their courses. Talking among themselves in late night "bull sessions" may teach many of them more theology than their professors.

This should change. I think Princeton and other top universities will have to address theological issues with a new explicitness and I suspect they will. Theology is a much deeper and in the end far more interesting subject than the mastery of economic laws of production and distribution in hopes of a future arrival at a new heaven on earth of complete material abundance.



# Warfield: The Person Behind the Theology

by HUGH THOMSON KERR

*The late Hugh Thomson Kerr was the Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield Professor of Theology for twenty-five years. He presented this address as part of the Annie Kinkead Warfield lecture series on March 1, 1982 and was introduced by then PTS President James I. McCord. This address was edited for publication by William O. Harris, Librarian for Archives and Special Collections emeritus.*

## INTRODUCTION OF THE LECTURER BY PRESIDENT JAMES I. MCCORD

ORDINARILY I SAY something about Professor Benjamin B. Warfield as an introduction to the Warfield Lectures, but since the topic this afternoon is "Warfield: The Person Behind The Theology," I don't want to leave Dr. Kerr an opportunity to correct any mistakes that I might make. It suffices to say that this lectureship was endowed by Dr. Warfield. His will stipulated that they carry not his name but the name of Mrs. Warfield. They are the "Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures." The lectureship is to be given in some area of Reformed doctrine.

While I will not say anything further about Dr. Warfield, I will say something about the Benjamin B. Warfield Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus who is our lecturer this year. Dr. Hugh Thomson Kerr is a graduate of Shadyside Academy in Pittsburgh and an honors graduate in philosophy of Princeton University. He returned home to Pittsburgh to study at Western Theological Seminary, took his doctorate at the University of Edinburgh and did further study at the University of Tübingen. While on the faculty of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, he was called to Princeton where, for nearly a quarter of a century, he was the Benjamin B. Warfield Professor of Systematic Theology. Here he continues a very active career in many areas, but especially as the editor of *Theology Today*. I can say without any fear of successful contradiction that there is no editor in the theological field who is the peer of Hugh Thomson Kerr. I cannot believe that each number of *Theology Today* will be fresher and more challenging, but it is, and this is a tribute to the freshness and creativity and depth of Dr. Kerr.

I welcome you, sir, and it is an honor to present you in the first of your "Warfield Lectures."

## I

I am most grateful to you, President McCord, for your generous words of introduction, and I am honored to the point of necessary modesty when I

realize the long and distinguished list of names who have given this lectureship. In preparing the series, I deliberately refrained from looking them up for fear of being intimidated. When I first came to the campus, we had just one series of lectures, the "Stone Lectureship." The quip going around the campus in those days was that the students asked for bread and the faculty gave them a Stone Lecture. I don't know what they say about the Warfield Lectures, and I'm glad I don't! "Benny" Warfield, (as his students called him behind his back), in his expansive way, decreed in his will that there be at least six lectures in this series. Some months ago Jim McCord (as I call him to his face) prodded me and asked if I remembered that there were to be six lectures. He said he wanted to make sure, because a few years ago Nathan Scott begged off the last two because, as he said, "I don't have six ideas." Well, I sympathize with Professor Scott, though I don't agree with him. Anyway, I have only one idea, and I am going to spread it out over six lectures.

The theme for this series of Warfield Lectures, "The Person of the Theologian," implies that who the person is has something to do with what the person thinks. Personal identity can be thought of not only as self-awareness but as self-expression. To identify the person of the theologian should provide some clue about the theologian's theology.

This is not how we usually think about theology as an academic discipline. We tend to think of theology as idea-oriented and describe it as systematic, doctrinal, dogmatic, apologetic, kerygmatic, experiential, or, to use the quaint title of the one whose name graces these Lectures, "didactic and polemic." (We today may hesitate to use such heavily loaded terms though many of us, no doubt, from the perspective of our students would seem more didactic and polemic than systematic!)

Whether a persuasive case can be made for pursuing the person behind the theology remains to be seen, but the diverse topics for this lecture series will attempt to illustrate what promise there may be for this approach, and we will begin with Warfield himself. In many ways, Warfield would appear so far hidden behind his theology as to remain inscrutable, so this will be a test case for our thesis.

## II

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield was born November the 5th, 1851 at Grasmere, the family estate near Lexington, Kentucky. His father, William Warfield, was a successful cattle and horse breeder who was descended from Richard Warfield, an English Puritan who settled in Virginia in 1662.

Migrating from his native land for religious reasons, he and his family were forced to leave Virginia as soon as they arrived for refusing to accept the colonial governor's proclamation of the restoration of Charles II as King. They found refuge in the Catholic colony of Maryland. Benjamin Warfield's father was a scientifically-inclined gentlemen farmer who wrote and published two substantial volumes, *American Short-Horn Cattle Importations* in 1884 and *The Theory and Practice of Cattle Breeding* in 1889.

In the custom of the time, the father secured two private tutors, Lewis Barbour and James Kennedy Patterson, to prepare his son for college. Both tutors later achieved academic distinction: Barbour as Professor of Mathematics at Central University of Kentucky in Richmond, Kentucky and Patterson as a founder and long-time president of the University of Kentucky. They did their tutoring well and found a willing student.

The young Warfield was admitted to the sophomore class of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University, in 1868, the same year that James McCosh became president of that institution. Later Warfield, while reminiscing with McCosh about his student days, noted to the dour Scotsman that they both had entered Princeton the same year and that they both had achieved advanced standing. McCosh was not amused.

After graduation and a year of travel in Europe, mainly to Edinburgh and Heidelberg, Warfield surprised everyone by announcing his intention to study for the ministry.<sup>1</sup> In the interim, he returned to Kentucky, and, in his father's footsteps, began an editorial stint with the Lexington *Farmer's Home Journal*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Vol. XVI, No. 21, April 12, 1916, 623.

<sup>2</sup> [Editor's Note] Dr. Warfield became interested in Darwin's theory of evolution prior to his entering the College of New Jersey. He regularly purchased Darwin's books as soon as they were published and these volumes are preserved in the Warfield Collection in the Princeton Theological Seminary Library. During the year of his editorship of the *Farmer's Home Journal*, 1872 - 1873, he wrote articles applying Darwin's principles to the problems of Kentucky farmers. He was deeply interested in the relationship of evolution and Christian theology throughout his professional life. For a detailed account of Warfield's interest in Darwin and in evolution, see Bradley J. Gundlach, *The Evolution Question at Princeton: 1845-1929*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY, 1995. Also, David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 and David N. Livingstone, "Situating Evangelical Responses to Evolution," paper presented at ISAE Conference, "The Evangelical Engagement with Science," Wheaton College, March 30-April 1, 1995. For a complete collection of Warfield's writings on evolution, see B. B. Warfield, *Evolution, Scripture, and Science: Selected Writings*. Edited with an introduction by Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000. See also the essay by David N. Livingstone and Mark A. Noll, "B. B. Warfield (1851-1921): A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist," in *Isis: The Journal of the History of Science Society*, 2000, Vol. 91, 283-304.

Entering Princeton Seminary in 1873, he graduated three years later and promptly married Annie Pearce Kinkadee, the daughter of a prominent lawyer in his home town of Lexington, Kentucky. He decided to return to Europe to study at the University of Leipzig. Sailing on the *S.S. Abyssinia*, the newly-wed graduate student arrived in Leipzig in the Fall of 1876 and began his studies with Christoph Ernst Luthardt and Franz Delitzsch, representatives of the so-called Erlangen School of Theology whose motto was “*. . . eine alte Weise, neue Wahrheit zu lernen*,” (through an old way, new truth to learn), and who emphasized the importance of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Reformation Confessions as basic resources for church theology. While he remained unswervingly loyal to the Reformed faith, he obviously could applaud the Leipzig commitment to scriptural authority and the normative value of Reformation creeds.

Leaving for home on the *S.S. Russia*, the young couple interrupted their trip in order to attend the first world council of the newly-formed “Alliance of Reformed Churches Throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian System” held in Edinburgh during the first week of July, 1877. Reaching the United States they traveled home to Kentucky by way of Pittsburgh, where without knowing it Warfield was to return shortly as a professor. In Pittsburgh, the Warfields lost all of their luggage in a local riot, including a large collection of German books for which he had paid a thousand dollars (quite a handsome outlay)!

Before leaving for Europe that second time, he had received an invitation to teach Old Testament at the Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, across the river from Pittsburgh. (It was known as “Western” because it was west of the Allegheny Mountains.) He had, however, already become more inclined toward New Testament studies, even though earlier he had avoided Greek in college as irrelevant for his intended career in mathematics and physics. When another invitation came from Pittsburgh in 1878, this time to teach New Testament, he accepted. On the death of Archibald Alexander Hodge in 1886, he was called to Princeton to take the chair of Didactic and Polemic Theology.

For thirty-five years, until the day of his death, February 16, 1921, he lived at 74 Mercer Street, the house beside Alexander Hall which Charles Hodge had built when he began teaching and in which he lived the rest of his days. While there, and here in Miller Chapel, and next door in Stuart Hall, he brought scholarly distinction and theological controversy and excitement to this campus. Not everyone, then or now, could agree with Warfield's austere and overly persuasive apologetic theology. But no one could decry or minimize his intellectual integrity or the sheer vastness of his theological grasp.



Among the best of the religious leaders of his day, he stood out as a theological renaissance figure.

### III

Genealogies can be tempting, fascinating, and sometimes very embarrassing. In Warfield's case, the urge to interpret his conservative and voluminous theology by looking at his prolific and aristocratic family forbears seems almost irresistible. Whether a skilled geneticist, aided by a competent genealogist, could unravel for us inherited tendencies and acquired characteristics, we cannot be sure. But for what it is worth, we can at least acknowledge three distinct but converging branches of lineage by way of family names—"Warfield," "Breckinridge," and "Cabell." We have already mentioned William Warfield, Benjamin's father, the Kentucky gentleman farmer, descended from Richard Warfield who left England to settle in Virginia and Maryland in the seventeenth century. Richard Warfield raised a family of six sons who occupied estates all over Maryland known variously as Warfield's Forest, Warfield's Plains, Warfield's Right, Warfield's Range, Warfield's Hope, and what else, Warfield's Folly.

One line moved through Henry Mactier Warfield, a Baltimore Confederate sympathizer, who was arrested and sent to Fort McHenry in the opening days of the Civil War along with his close friend with the curious name, Severen Teackle Wallis, after whom he named one of his sons, Teackle Wallis Warfield. He, understandably, disliked his first name and called himself simply, T. Wallis Warfield. Sickly with tuberculosis, he married Alice Montague, always described in Baltimore society news as "one of the two beautiful Montague sisters." Their daughter was named Bessie Wallis Warfield, who, later dropping the Bessie, picked up a title, "the Duchess of Windsor."

Mention can be made, though nothing much can be made of it, of Catherine Ann Ware Warfield whose husband, a first-cousin once removed of Benjamin, was Robert Elisha Warfield. His father, Elisha Warfield, turned from medicine to become a prosperous merchant and the owner of a famous race horse known, (what else?) as "Lexington!" Catherine achieved considerable fame and distinction as the Natchez, Mississippi-born, fiercely Southern writer of dozens of sentimental poems and novels. A later evaluation speaks of her "ponderous diction" making her stories unreadable today because of her "overwrought emotional attitude." Well, we can hardly attribute Benjamin's literary style to Catherine, but we might wish that the cool apologist had inherited some of her emotion.



Two more Warfields demand our attention, a brother and a wife. Ethelbert Dudley Warfield, Benjamin's younger brother, followed him to the College of New Jersey. After graduation, he studied for a year at Oxford, returned to take a law degree at Columbia, practiced law for a time in Lexington and then moved through a succession of academic positions at Miami University in Ohio and at Lafayette College and then at Wilson College, both in Pennsylvania. He served as the president of each of them and was also a member of the Board of Directors of Princeton Seminary. A Phi Beta Kappa in college, he was also the recipient of five honorary degrees.

In 1876, after his graduation from Princeton Seminary, Benjamin Warfield married Annie Pearce Kinkead of Lexington. Shortly thereafter, as we have already noted, they sailed for Europe. The daughter of George Blackburn Kinkead, an eminent Lexington lawyer, her line reaches back on one side to a woman, Eleanor Guy, captured by the Indians in 1764 and only released fourteen years later, and, on another side, to the famous Revolutionary War general, George Rogers Clark, known as the "Hannibal of the West."

One afternoon, during their stay in Leipzig, the newly married couple, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and Annie Pearce Kinkead, was caught in a violent thunderstorm while taking a walk together. For some reason, the experience proved shattering and devastating for the young woman. She never fully recovered. For years during their Princeton residency, Annie Kinkead Warfield lived the life of a virtual recluse and, for the last two years of her existence, she was a bedridden invalid. She died November 18, 1915 and was buried in Princeton Cemetery to be joined five years later by her devoted husband.

"Devoted" hardly contains the weight of Benjamin's loyal commitment to his life-long companion. He guarded, protected, and stood by her while pursuing his full teaching and writing assignments. He himself, by his own choice, became house-confined and scarcely ever ventured more than an hour or two from her side. Surely, we must say that the astonishing quantity of the Warfield biblical and theological corpus issued from a constant and continuous intellectual life. At a study desk surrounded on all sides by his books and inspired, no doubt, in his sequestered confinement by the great theological minds of all times, he patiently scribed with his own hand page after page after page.

After all the years of teaching, writing, and editorial work, what can we suppose was in his mind when, in his last will and testament, he made provision for an annual lectureship on the Reformed faith in the name of Annie Kinkead Warfield? We cannot pretend to answer that question, but perhaps an otherwise insignificant word from the Twenty-Third Psalm

suggests itself to us, namely, the ineffable quality in time of trouble when someone promises to be "with" us as we walk through the valley of the shadow.

It would take us too long and too far afield to run down other branches of this remarkable family. The maternal side, with the "Breckinridge" and "Cabell" names, would take us back to colonial times and lead us on into significant state and national politics, as well as into educational and ecclesiastical enterprises of all kinds.

If we took a ramble down this road, we might bump into a veteran of the French and Indian Wars, a daughter of Samuel Miller, (whose name was given to this chapel,) a president of Oglethorpe University, a companion of Jefferson, Monroe and Madison, a wonderful woman with a mellifluous name of Sophonisba, a president of Jefferson College, a vice-president of the United States under James Buchanan, both Union and Confederate officers, more than a couple of editors, a tie to Patrick Henry and Henry Clay, a person named Issa Desha, a colonial surgeon who established his own private hospital, a voter for George Washington, a founder of the University of Virginia, a Swedenborgian, several anti-Catholics and some anti-slavery crusaders, a seminary president, a professor of practical theology, members of Congress, a chaplain to the Congress, lawyers, local educators, public school administrators, a political fugitive to Cuba, both Old School and New School Presbyterians, an opponent of Sunday mails, and, before streets and avenues, many of his people were domiciled on estates, farms and plantations with such names as Grove Hill, Cabell's Dale, Grasmere, Stockdale, Union Hill, Boston Hill, Warminster, Mulberry Hill and Liberty Hall.

What, we can ask, may all these have in common, if anything, and how can this biographical repertoire relate to our theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield? Surely we can say that this represents an impressive pedigree of aristocratic, affluent, landed gentry. If we think of them as exemplars of the Protestant work ethic, they thought of themselves as responsible citizens, striving for the common good, the glory of the church, and the ultimate, if not immediate, victory of truth over evil. Privileged but not pampered, educated but always learning, autocratic but believers in original sin, wealthy but scarcely philanthropists, given much and driven to do much, they epitomized qualities we today both respect and reject.

#### IV

Whatever compulsive characteristics Warfield may have inherited from this illustrious family tree, and however he may have evaluated his own

personal drives, values, and goals, the sheer quantity, variety and substance of his written work proves almost overwhelming. Of his printed and published work, there are ten large, and I mean very large, volumes of posthumously selected and edited articles known as the Oxford Edition as well as two volumes of additional essays put together by John E. Meeter, plus two volumes of handwritten scrapbooks and fifteen volumes of *Opuscula* (1880-1918), collected and bound by Warfield himself. He also wrote a major work on the textual criticism of the New Testament which went through nine editions, published three volumes of sermons, several commentaries, and a significant investigation of popular religious movements, *Counterfeit Miracles*. Yet we are nowhere near the end of the list, for there are literally hundreds of essays, reviews and other miscellanea in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and especially in the three Princeton quarterlies over which he had editorial supervision from 1889 until the day of his death in 1921. We are talking about a theological authorship on the order of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Barth.

Warfield was indeed an editor as well as a prolific writer and a distinguished theological professor. From 1825 to 1929, a period of 105 years, a quarterly journal of theology appeared in association with Princeton Seminary under a variety of names: the *Biblical Repertory*, the *Princeton Review*, the *Presbyterian Review*, the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* and the *Princeton Theological Review*. Warfield began to write for a Princeton journal, the *Presbyterian Review*, when he arrived on campus in 1887. Two years later in 1889 he became an editor of that journal and continued as an editor of Princeton journals until the year before his death, 1920, a period of a little over thirty years.

He was a prodigious editor. Most of his subsequent essays on the Bible, on patristic theology, and on the Reformation which were later reprinted in book form appeared first as articles in the *Princeton Theological Review* or its predecessor journals. He was also a reviewer of books, and book reviewing is, I think, one of the most important means of theological communication. It is the best way for students and ministers and church people to find out what ideas are circulating at the time. There is no question about that! A book review communicates, and Warfield reviewed books. He himself prepared, if I count rightly, 780 book reviews of which 318 were very substantial critical reviews. He reviewed just about everything that came into his orbit, religious, theological, literary, philosophical, scientific and from every country and language in the world including one book written in modern Greek. If he frequently withheld approval or politely destroyed an author's thesis, as he often did, he did so with careful scrutiny and a scholarly awareness of the vast

panorama of Christian history. And in the meantime, of course, he was writing books, editing the journal and carrying his teaching load.

Going over the contents of the issues under Warfield's editorial oversight, I have been impressed at the roll-call of theological names included. Here, for example, we read about McCosh, Orr, Schaff, Bavinck, Delitzsch, Doumergue, Harnack, Hastings, Martineau, Ritschl, Jowett, Loisy, Pfleiderer, Underhill, Wellhausen and dozens and dozens of others. Every significant name and book and topic of the theological times can be found in the pages he prepared, copy-edited and printed. Since the *Princeton Theological Review* in its later years after Warfield's death grew increasingly provincial, ingrown and scholastic, so that the venture simply expired and died in 1929 (some said of dry-rot) this too is evidence that tells us something about Warfield. It was his breadth and depth which gave the journal life. Santayana, whose name appeared in Warfield's journal, warned in his *Life of Reason* "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Let me venture just one observation on Warfield's theological perspective before turning to another aspect of the person behind the theology. Though I personally have little affinity with some of his most characteristic theological emphases, such as his view of the authority of the Scripture tied to the theory of original autographs, or his uncritical estimate of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, or his reluctance to support his denomination's interest in revising its doctrinal standards, I have nothing but admiration for his conviction that Christian faith and Biblical truth should be interpreted with intellectual rigor and honesty. His was a vast reservoir of historical learning, and he drew upon it to defend the faith as he saw best at a time when he feared the worst.

It is this side of his motivation that bothers me rather than his position on doctrinal issues with which we can allow, at least in these days, some differences of nuance. My concern is why was Warfield so afraid? With all his erudition and learning, far outranking most of his contemporaries, he seemed in deadly fear that things biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical, within the restricted boundaries he set, would collapse, disintegrate, and perish, never to be heard of again. He bent his mind and will to preserve a structure of doctrine, no doubt because he believed it was true, indeed the best form of truth, and yet, in the process he seems to have had no confidence in either the self-validating power of the truth or, one might even say, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Everything Warfield wrote projects the mood of cool, calculated exposition and interpretation. He never exhibited any sense of intellectual doubt, let alone any suggestion of emotional anxiety. And yet beneath this placid



surface, we find a person deeply disturbed by trends in his own time. Although he was himself a superb biblical expositor, he was afraid that the historical-critical method would completely undermine all authority.

Warfield had a scholar's instinct for history and the development of dogma in the Church over the centuries, yet he pinned his position to a seventeenth-century creedal statement (the *Westminster Confession of Faith*) which reflected not the genius of the Protestant Reformation but the rigidity and scholasticism of the post-Reformation period. He was a skilled debater who knew how to draw up a brief, defend it, and move toward the persuasion of his audience with suave, gentlemanly politeness, and yet he persisted in the naive assurance that if you simply explain something clearly and rationally, your opponent eventually will accept your argument and adopt your own position. He never indicated any doubt about his own position. It never occurred to him that "those convinced against their will are of the same opinion still." He could not accept the possibility that reason is no reason for belief. He was so committed to a monistic structure of truth that a plurality of options would necessarily imply for him the breakdown of theology itself.

We cannot be sure that this suggestion of an internal dilemma between convictional certitude and panic or fear of annihilation provides the proper clue to Warfield's theological person, but, if true, it in no way diminishes his intellectual stature and, on the contrary, it makes him that much more human in spite of himself, and a wrestler of truth with the rest of us.

## V

Suppose we were now to peer behind Warfield's theology for a somewhat different glimpse of the person. How would we go about it? There are several lines of approach open to us. Let me simply suggest three possibilities.

(1) *Literary style*. If, as Samuel Wesley once said, "style is the dress of thought," then we give expression through our written words not only to ideas but to ourselves. Clean, lean compression is the trademark of contemporary style, but in Warfield's day extended sentences, structured essays, and long sermons were customary and expected. The literary style of his time no doubt bespeaks a more leisurely day, an unquestioning confidence in verbal communication and the persuasive power of words.

If Warfield's style would seem more contrived and elaborate than contemporary models of theological writing, though I am not sure about that, it must be said that he knew how to construct lucid, direct sentences, and that his meaning was always clear. He is not an easy writer to read, for he makes us



work as he thinks. It is often slow going, not designed for those who would read as they run.

I would like to think that Warfield's literary style grew out of his editorial experience. While it is true that hardly anyone achieves a clear writing style without also engaging in a great deal of reading and writing of all kinds, editorial work involves proof-reading and re-writing of what others have written. It is an editor's responsibility to make clear what is unclear and to simplify what is complicated, often to the chagrin of authors.

While I feel certain that the enormous investment of time he devoted to his editorial task must often have seemed tedious and unrewarding to him, he must surely have realized that this provided him the necessary self-instruction for his own writing.

(2) *Hymns and verses*. A second way to get at Warfield would be through his hymns and his verses. It is not generally known that Warfield wrote several hymns and a considerable collection of religious verse. Since both media represent very different literary styles from biblical and theological writing, we might imagine to find here some personal, perhaps emotional, sides of our otherwise solemn, prosaic theologian.

The verdict in my judgement has to be "A" for effort. The hymns are stilted and didactic, the verses labored. Here, for example, is the second stanza of his hymn, "The Love of God Almighty:"

Yea, our mother may forget us;  
Yea, our father fail;  
Yea, the bridegroom may grow careless,—  
Other thoughts prevail:  
We may change, and all the whiteness  
Of our souls may blot:  
O the love of God Almighty,  
Lo, it changes not.

Well, I'm not sure we can sing that in Miller Chapel these days. Incidentally, he seems to have anticipated George Beverly Shea in the Billy Graham theme song with another one of his hymns, "How Glorious Art Thou, O Our God!" But even though set to the familiar tune "St. Anne," the hymn achieved no fame or recognition.

The Warfield poems seem stilted rather than from the heart. For example, his Advent verses, of which he wrote quite a few, are clogged with Christological references, and St. Augustine's aphorisms which he set to rhymed meters hardly come across as poetic metaphors. There is, however, one

doublet that may strike us as intriguingly personal and as they say today, "disclosive." It's called, "Wanted: A Samaritan."

Prone in the road, he lay  
Wounded and sore bested;  
Priests, Levites passed that way,  
And turned aside the head.

They were not hardened men  
In human service slack:  
His need was great: but then,  
His face, you see, was black.

You have to remember that Warfield was from the South, and this was something for him to say at that time! He wrote at least two articles on race: "A Calm View of the Freedman's Case" in 1887 and "Drawing the Color Line," in 1888. The first is a harsh criticism of the indifference to the plight of freedmen and the "spirit of caste" in the North as well as the South. The second is a strenuous protest against the movement in the Presbyterian Church in the USA to establish separate presbyteries for black congregations as a violation of "the fundamental law of the Church of the Living God" as set forth in Galatians 3:28.

(3) *Student days, pranks, and jokes.* A third way to get at Warfield is through his student days and pranks and jokes. If we can pardon Wordsworth his intended generic terms, we can invoke on Warfield's behalf the poet's epigram, "the child is father of the man." If, in maturity, we learn to mask our feelings and present a solemn countenance to the public, as for example, the awesome portrait of Warfield that hangs in the Main Lounge of the Campus Center, in our youthful years we are less inhibited. (This is one reason why we often go back to them, I suppose.) All of which is to say that we don't know much about Warfield the person in his mature and sedate years, but we do have a few incidents of his college years that just may prove revealing, as do some of his early photographs, hinting at a jaunty, carefree youth.

Let us assume, as I think we can, that college days involve considerable group camaraderie, so that what happens to one classmate happens, so to say, to all. Remember, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield was a member of the Class of 1871 of the College of New Jersey. Here are a few episodes as recorded by the class secretary in various class yearbooks which have been preserved in the Princeton University Library Archives.

(a) "William Stewart greatly amused the class, early this session, by his attempt to dye his blonde whiskers, and thereby make them more

apparent to the eye. He succeeded so well in his attempt that they literally died off taking with them part of the skin. Doc's face, for quite a while, presented a very peculiar appearance, somewhat like a partly peeled apple looks after it has been exposed to the air."

(b) "Wilson created a great deal of amusement by his recitation to Dr. McCosh. On the Doctor's putting the question, 'Where is Paul stopping now, Mr. Wilson?', he received the following answer: 'At the home of Phillip the Eunuch, who was singularly blessed in his family, having five daughters who prophesied.'" And the class secretary adds, "the joke was for a long while kept upon Wilson and his number of nicknames was greatly increased."

(c) In their Senior poll in 1871, the "Matrimonial Status" (this is an all men's college, remember) was noted: "Settled, 1; Cases of Animated Suspension, 10; Prospecting, 17; Having but Vague Intentions, 25; Afloat, 8; Chanceless, 4; Candidates for Bachelor's Degree, 5; On the High Road to Utah, 2; Pretended Misogynists, 8."

(d) Twenty years after graduation, the Class Historian notes that "the Reverend Dr. Warfield says that there is nothing for him to tell of himself during the past five years as his is an uneventful life." Six years later, in 1907, the Historian reports, having received no communication, "Warfield is known to be alive because he was seen by several of the Class walking on the campus at Reunion." At their fortieth Reunion in 1911, Warfield paid his dues and sent in his signed intention to be on hand. He was indeed among those present and partook of the Class Dinner which according to the menu that has been preserved included "broiled salmon, roast lamb, spring chicken, vanilla ice cream, strawberries and cream . . . [with a] basket of excellent champagne. . . plus boxes of cigars."

(e) Returning to his undergraduate years, the Class Historian noted that on November 6th, 1870, "Warfield and James Steen distinguished themselves by indulging in a little Sunday fight in front of the Chapel after Dr. McCosh's afternoon lecture. The cause of the fight was an exceedingly uncomplimentary picture of Steen drawn by 'Wolfie'" (a nickname given to Warfield because of his Southern accent, perhaps) "during the lecture, in lieu of taking notes, and then shown to several of their neighbors. The result was that they were separated by mutual friends after two or three harmless rounds."

The episode must have made an impression on classmates for Warfield is later referred to in Class notes as "the Pugilist." Reporting on his first European tour, it was written of Warfield "that while in London, he nightly

visited the opera, theaters and other evil and pernicious haunts . . . and when he got to Germany he took great delight in acting as referee to the Heidelberg Dueling Corps."

Well, we may add, he continued for many years and throughout his life to depict those whom he disliked in uncomplimentary colors, fighting in front of and sometimes inside the chapel, and taking delight in refereeing all kinds of duels, mostly biblical, theological and ecclesiastical. From the very beginning to the end, Warfield was a fighter.

If we apply to Warfield the message of the ancient legend about the phoenix rising renewed from its own altar fires, we can fashion perhaps a theological directive from yesterday for today: "From the fires of the past, carry the flame not the ashes!" There is so much good in the Warfield heritage, so much intellectual integrity, so vast a panorama of the biblical and theological landscape, such astonishing versatility, professional commitment and personal dedication! All this should not be lost but recovered and revived for another day, especially our day. But to do so requires a careful sifting of the ashes so as to leave the residue behind, to allow the dead to bury the dead, to winnow out the wheat germ from the sterile chaff. This after all, is what it means to be a conservative, or for that matter, a liberal. This is the true Reformed spirit, recreating the vital spark of the past for today, putting aside the useless rubbish and detritus of the past so that the flame can be rekindled from the ashes. That, we must resolve, spells out the program for theological education and theological scholarship for today and for tomorrow. Warfield did not say it, but I think he would approve: "From the fires of the past, carry the flame, not the ashes!"



PROFESSOR BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD (LEFT) IN HIS STUDY WITH GEORGE T. PURVES, PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT. *PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY ARCHIVES*

## Edward A. Dowey: A Remembrance

by DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

*Daniel L. Migliore, Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology, co-author of Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope (1999), gave this tribute to Professor Edward A. Dowey at the memorial service in Miller Chapel on May 31, 2003.*

WE HAVE GATHERED here today to give thanks to God for the life of Edward A. Dowey and for the many gifts that he shared with his family, with his Princeton Seminary students and colleagues, with the wider world of theological scholarship, and with the ecumenical church.

The first time I met Ed was in the spring of 1957. It was a Sunday evening service held in this chapel. I had just finished my junior year at Princeton Seminary, and Ed had just been appointed professor of the history of Christian doctrine. He preached on the doctrine of election, and when the sermon was finished I knew that Princeton had added an impressive voice to its faculty.

Ed was an internationally recognized historian of Christian doctrine. His special research and writing areas were the theologies of John Calvin and the Zurich Reformer Heinrich Bullinger. Whether Ed's favorite course to teach was Calvin or Luther would have to be called a toss-up. Of his writings, Ed's study of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God remains a landmark volume, but his influence goes beyond his own books and articles. Important as his writings was his mentorship to a large number of Reformation scholars who are now leaders in their field. The quality of his legacy as a Reformation scholar is seen in the wonderful *Festschrift* entitled *Probing the Reformed Tradition* presented to Ed several years ago by fellow scholars, many of whom are his students.

Although a distinguished historian, Ed didn't believe that the church could live only in the past. He admired the *Westminster Confession* that he once compared to a magnificent baroque fugue on the sovereignty of God. Yet he insisted that the church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century necessarily had to bear its own distinctive witness to the gospel. As chair of the committee that drafted the *Confession of 1967*, Ed played a major role in helping the church find its voice at a time marked by the civil rights struggle, the cold war, the war in Vietnam, and the increasing plight of the world's poor. The theme of the *Confession of 1967* is God's reconciliation of the world in Jesus Christ and the church's participation in the ministry of reconciliation, a ministry that embraces all of life, including the spheres of international, economic, racial, and gender



relationships. For many of us here the *Confession of 1967* remains a timely guide for the church's proclamation of the gospel in the world today. To this day pastors and seminarians continue to benefit from Ed's writings on the Confession of 1967 and other documents contained in the Presbyterian *Book of Confessions*.

Son of a Presbyterian minister and a graduate of Princeton Seminary, Ed served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy in World War II. Later his would be a ministry primarily of teaching, first at Lafayette College and Columbia University, and then as professor of the history of Christian doctrine at McCormick and Princeton Theological Seminaries. In one sense, then, Ed was very much a churchman, but in no sense was he an apologist for the church. On the contrary, an abiding theme of his teaching and writing was the church as *semper reformanda*, always in need of being reformed. And by reform of the church Ed did not mean peevish carping or arbitrary criticism. Reform for him meant calling the church to sound proclamation and right order in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ed Dowe took Christian doctrine seriously. The question of truth mattered to him. "By grace alone," "by faith alone," "glory to God alone," were not just pious phrases for him. He was convinced that these ringing declarations are true because they point to the heart of the gospel. He believed that when affirmed from the heart they make a difference in Christian ministry and in Christian life. As an heir of the Calvinian tradition of faith and theology, Ed took Christian doctrine seriously, not at the expense of Christian practice but for the sake of informed practice, for the sake of practice open to correction, for the stamina to persevere in practice. Ed sometimes thundered against the Princeton Seminary field work program. He would tell seminary students: "Your calling right now is not to play junior pastor on extended weekends. For these three precious years, your calling is to study." Ed may not have had the definitive answer to the question of the relationship of study and practice; and maybe those of us here today don't either. But it was no accident that Ed was among those who marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. at Selma, who called the church to repentance and genuine renewal of life in response to the demand of Black Power representatives for reparations from the church, who took seriously the responsibility to press for recruitment of minority and women faculty and students at Princeton Seminary, who understood his Christian commitment to include the effort to assure due process for a young African-American charged with a serious crime in Plainfield, New Jersey during a time of great civil unrest. In his own life Ed didn't separate serious theological reflection and ministerial practice.

The two for him were intimately bound together. He often worried that the theme of reconciliation might easily be misinterpreted as a relaxation of the prophetic call to do justice.

Ed was not afraid to challenge authorities when he thought they were wrong. In one of Paul Tillich's seminars in New York attended by Ed, Tillich criticized Calvin for teaching that the majesty of God has no place for human freedom. Ed responded by saying that this did not properly represent Calvin's position and in the following seminar session produced the texts to prove it. Later Tillich asked one of his graduate assistants, "Who is the tall, thin student, with the deep voice who asks all the questions? His voice sounds like my father." At the height of the McCarthy inquisition, when John Mackay and the "Presbyterian Letter" that he had composed repudiating the spirit of McCarthyism were attacked as communist inspired, Ed wrote a devastating response in *The Christian Century* showing that the charges were complete fabrications and utterly preposterous.

When important issues were being decided in the church and at the Seminary, Ed fought hard for open, honest deliberation. He understood faculty meetings as times for serious debate, and on more than one occasion even succeeded in making them interesting. Although at times he pressed his case like a prosecuting attorney, he respected the right of others to be heard and tried to be fair to those with whom he disagreed. There was the occasion when a Princeton University professor, a renowned Nietzsche expert and an outspoken atheist, was invited to lecture in the Campus Center on the topic, "What a Philosopher Thinks of Theology." A primary mark of theologians, the polemical philosopher said, is that they are always defensive. After the lecture, Ed asked the speaker what he thought was the difference between theologians and their umbrellas! That was Ed at his debater's best. But the more important point is that Ed not only strongly supported the invitation to an outspoken unbeliever to lecture at the Seminary but also treated the guest with respect, civility, and at least an attempt at a bit of humor.

And then there was the great debate between Ed Dowey and his colleague George Hendry over the final draft of the *Confession of 1967*. It was held in the Main Lounge of the Campus Center before a standing room only crowd. The issue focused on what the proposed new confession had to say about the authority of the Bible. George, also a member of the drafting committee, was greatly disappointed that in the final stages of the drafting process the committee had, in his view, bent too far in the direction of pleasing the conservative critics of the new confession. "How would you grade a semester paper," George asked Ed, "that seemed very promising in some respects but

that contained a serious flaw?" Ed, who had the highest regard for George, replied, "I probably would give it an A-. I certainly wouldn't fail it." Ed fought hard for what he thought was important in the life of the church and in the life of the Seminary but he was not mean-spirited or disrespectful of those with whom he disagreed.

Ed was a complex person. He had a fabulous memory and could also be astonishingly forgetful. He could be singlemindedly serious about important matters but also had a wonderful sense of humor. He defended the *Confession of 1967* against its severest critics but also recognized its limitations as evidenced in his support of efforts in recent years to prepare a gender inclusive version. Ed was, furthermore, a tough-minded Christian historian and theologian who had a deep faith, but who didn't wear it on his sleeves. He had little patience with sentimentality posing as deep piety. For him a biblically rooted faith is ready to take risks, doesn't deny having doubts, and doesn't pretend to have all the answers. Agreeing with Reinhold Niebuhr's memorable remark that human dignity makes democracy possible and human sin makes it necessary, Ed insisted that open process and open debate are as important in the governance of the church as in the affairs of the state. He thought that unchecked power in the hands of a few is dangerous even if, or perhaps especially if, they happen to wear clerical collars.

Realistic and tough-minded, Ed's piety and pastoral sensitivity were nevertheless real and found expression mostly in poetry and music. Even if his preferred way of praising God was in the singing of a Bach chorale or a hymn like *Ein' feste Burg*, he was no stranger to other faith idioms. I remember an evening in Ed and Lois' living room in their house on Mercer Street. Ed sat at the piano playing and singing old gospel hymns. There were impressive improvisations and flourishes. Ed was having fun, but at the same time you sensed that these old hymns had their respected place in the mostly concealed recesses of his being. And while Ed never served as a parish minister for any extended period, he knew the territory. I remember the occasion in class when Ed told his students about his ministry as a naval chaplain. Having some difficulty in containing his emotions, he said, "One day you too will experience that when you are trying to minister to someone in need, you find that it is you who are being ministered to."

We will miss Ed the beloved husband, father, and brother. We also will miss Ed the historian who didn't think you could live in the past; the churchman who expressed his love for the church by calling it to continual reform by the Word of God; the theologian who wanted doctrine to be taken seriously so that Christian life and practice would be strengthened; the

colleague and friend who fought hard but fairly for matters of importance; the Christian scholar who was tough-minded but also tender-hearted in his love of Jesus Christ and in his commitment to the ministry of reconciliation to all of us sinners, and especially to the wounded, the excluded, and the despised among us. *Deo Soli Gloria.*

# Edward A. Dowey, Jr., 1918-2003

by ELSIE ANNE MCKEE

*Elsie Anne McKee, Archibald Alexander Professor of Reformation Studies and the History of Worship, author of Katharina Schütz Zell: The Life and Thought of a Sixteenth-Century Reformer (1999) and editor and translator of John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety (2001), delivered a shortened version of this memorial tribute to Professor Edward A. Dowey, Jr. before the Seminary faculty on November 5, 2003.*

**F**AITH AND HUMOR, high standards for self and others, Calvin and Bullinger, poetry and music and art, critical devotion to church and country, biting commentary and courage for justice, love for family and pride in their independent gifts, the ability to poke fun at himself, devastating critique and equally forthright praise, loyalty that was never blind but also was unshakable: Edward A. Dowey, Jr., was always very real.

Much of Ed Dowey's professional life is well known to this group; many of us were either his students or his colleagues. For that reason I am giving minimal attention to the big public events and most space to the human stories.

Ed's father was Edward Atkinson Dowey, Sr., from a large and poor Scotch-Irish family, the sixth of eleven children of an alcoholic father and a very strong mother.<sup>1</sup> Edward Sr. got his theological education at Reformed Episcopal Seminary and was ordained in that church, but then became a minister of the United Presbyterian Church of North America and first served a church in Philadelphia. During seminary years, Edward Sr. worked under Dr. Forrest E. Dager of St. Paul's church; his pay was \$5 month, which he considered a huge amount and he gave it to his mother and lived on candy bars. It was at St. Paul's that Edward Sr. met his wife, Margaret Turner, and Dr. Dager married them. Margaret was from a German family from Frankfurt, of German Reformed background, textile and carpet making people who did not hold with women's education. Margaret, however, broke with this view; with the help of the daughter of Episcopal Bishop Nicholson, who encouraged her, Margaret worked to earn the money to attend nursing school and eventually became head nurse in charge of the obstetrics ward at Temple University Hospital.

<sup>1</sup> Much of this material is drawn from taped interviews with Prof. E. A. Dowey, held by the Rev. William Harris and Dr. Elsie McKee in the early 1990's (most in 1994). This section from tape 413, May 6, 1994; page numbers are given for typed transcription where appropriate. Seminary Archives, Luce Library.



Ed Jr. was born on Feb. 21, 1918, in Philadelphia. When he was almost two and his younger brother Bill was only a few months old, the family moved to Ohio to another church belonging to the UPNA. Ed remembers that at this time homes in this community did not have electricity, and the school bus was drawn by horses named Maud and Evan. This congregation was made up of people of Covenanter background who had moved to the Northwest Territory in the early 19th c. because they objected to slavery; the family who lived next door to the Doweys was African-American. Many of the elders would go home on Sunday afternoons and read Matthew Henry's commentary to check up on what their pastor had said that morning. The Covenanter Sabbath must be kept very carefully; for example, the card game Old Maids could be played on weekdays but not on Sunday—unless the cards all had Biblical characters on them instead of secular ones! On the other hand, the church supported itself by a carnival, which scandalized Edward Sr, and he made—or persuaded—the elders to change to a system of tithing for church income.

When Ed was ten the family moved to a UP church in Oakdale, near Pittsburgh, and three years later to the Dunmore Church (which belonged to the Presbyterian Church, USA) on the outskirts of Scranton. It was in this predominantly Roman Catholic mining community that Ed and Bill went to high school. The confessional differences were evident in social ways but apparently not at school. The school had other problems, however; the building originally planned for 300 now served 1200, with a very inadequate staff. Ed remembers one teacher who taught several subjects:

You couldn't tell the difference between them. . . . All he ever did was have a student stand in class and read outloud. He told us, this is a direct quotation, that civilization began where the Nile and the Tigris joined to form the Euripides. Then he would make a joke about it; he'd say, "You rip-a these, I rip-a those."<sup>2</sup>

There were exceptions to the poor quality of teachers, e.g., Miss Jesse Crime who taught biology, but the general level of instruction was such that Ed Jr. felt he had "never really recovered fully from that."<sup>3</sup>

Following high school, Ed went first to a junior college, Keystone, then to Lafayette College from which he graduated *summa cum laude* in 1940. Although he had originally thought of becoming a minister, Ed found the lively philosophical debates at college leading him to question his belief in

<sup>2</sup> Tape 413.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

God. It was not until he heard John Mackay that he decided he could and would study for the ministry.

I first heard of Mackay when I was at Lafayette College. There was a real question in my mind whether or not I was going to seminary. I was just about to not continue as a candidate for ministry. But Mackay's lecture changed my mind. The only respectable religious philosophy I had studied prior to Mackay's lecture was Neo-Thomism, which was never a possibility for me. But Mackay came in and talked Kierkegaard and he seemed so well informed. So I decided not only to go to seminary but to Princeton.

From seminary days Ed remembered a variety of stories, some about the professors and studies, many of which point to characteristics which shaped his whole life.

Mackay was, I think, the bona fide intellectual leader of the seminary when he was here, and his ecumenics course was quite the event. He invented the term ecumenics as a field of study. He would always talk about Unamuno and Dostoyevsky. He was a brilliant teacher. The most influential person for me at the seminary was [Joseph Lukl] Hromadka.<sup>4</sup>

Other teachers also appeared, and here again are evident themes which continued to be visible in Ed's own later work.

[Otto] Piper, especially, was a wonderful conduit of German academic work, which we needed. One didn't have to follow Piper's views to benefit from his extensive bibliographic essays. I kept his notes for years. . . . Piper had a very concrete view of angels. He believed that he had seen them and that they existed. He told us once about a motor vehicle accident. He was driving with Mrs. Piper in the front seat and just before a terrible accident in which neither of them was injured, there was a third person between them in the car: an angel. One time during a final examination, he gave a quotation from Schleiermacher who felt that angels were personifications rather than bodies. So I agreed with Schleiermacher in my long answer. When Piper returned the papers he said that he knew perfectly well that most of the students disagreed with him on angels. Only one person, though, actually attacked Piper's view on angels, and that was me. But I got an "A" anyway. Piper was a fine professional scholar. His point of view was often hard for me to absorb, but he was always respectful of others' points of view.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Tape 418 or side 2 of 417, 6.

<sup>5</sup> This from tape 417, April 8, 1994, 8-9.

There were many non-academic angles of the seminary experience, too. Ed was a member of the Friar Club and remembers jokes played by the Benham Club. Once a movie about a minister, entitled *One Foot in Heaven*, was playing.

When it came to town, the Benham Club called the Friar Club and said, "This is the Garden Theater. Since we have a movie here about a minister, we're letting all seminarians in for ten cents." So the Friars filed down there, and said "we're seminarians," and of course the Garden Theater people had no idea what they were talking about. They had to pay the whole thirty-five cents.<sup>6</sup>

Though he was shy, Ed also remembers dating occasionally.

A lot of the colleges nearby closed in the middle of winter in order to save coal. Elaine Mackay, a student at Wellesley, was home and I used to sit next to her and we dated some. In those days a date was a dollar; 35 cents a piece at the Playhouse and 15 cents a piece for ice cream soda at Beets afterward.<sup>7</sup>

After graduation from seminary Ed served as a Navy chaplain in the Pacific theatre for several years, and then as a hospital chaplain. That must have been a very difficult time, but he rarely spoke of it later, except to give examples in class. One was the story of the military wife who insisted on emergency baptism for her baby—a note about a very pastoral dilemma that Ed introduced into his discussion of Calvin's teaching on baptism.

After the war there were studies at Columbia—the MA in 1947, and then in Europe with Brunner. Ed told about how he came to work with the latter.

I had a surprising debate with Brunner over whether he would supervise my dissertation. I had given him my master's thesis to read, and I asked him what he thought of it and he said that it was not very good. We had a pitched battle for about a half an hour. And then he said, now I call Mrs. Brunner and we'll have some tea. And I said, I didn't come over here to drink tea. And so we went at it again. It was intense on the relation of philosophy and theology. There was finally some tea but I decided I had better pack my bags. The next day Brunner wrote a note urging me to stay in Zurich and write a dissertation there. He said it takes fire to make a real theologian.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Tape 417 side 2, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Tape 418 or side 2 of 417, April 1994, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Daniel L. Migliore, "A Conversation with Edward A. Dowey," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 9:2 (1988), 89.

Having completed his Th.D. in Zurich, Ed returned to the United States in 1949. First he taught at Lafayette for two years, next he was pastor to university students at Columbia and then assistant professor at Columbia, 1952-54. Meanwhile some of the most important events of his adult life occurred; in 1952 his still famous book on *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* was published; two years later he and Lois Montgomery were married, and over the next several years two children were born, Edward M. in 1956 and Elizabeth in 1958. During most of these years the Doweys lived in Chicago, where Ed taught at McCormick.

In 1957 President Mackay was again instrumental in bringing Ed DoweY to Princeton, this time as professor. At the Seminary Ed became involved in many social issues. One way Ed felt called to serve the church and the larger Christian community and his country was by supporting the famous "Letter to Presbyterians." The *Saturday Evening Post*, whose managing editor was a Presbyterian, attacked Mackay as a communist and insisted the "Letter to Presbyterians" was "nothing but communism." So Ed, outraged, went to check the cited likenesses between the communist propaganda sheets and the "Letter to Presbyterians" and found that they were minimal; for example, one of the parallels was simply the use of the word "historic." Over the next months Ed worked vigorously to collect all the relevant data and get a rebuttal to the *Post* articles published by *Time* magazine, which had already attacked McCarthy. He got promises but no publication. As he says, though, "I spent so much time that summer calling people to get my article published that Lois put the phone bill under recreation expenses! That's how much fun she thought I was having with it."<sup>9</sup>

Justice was a concern in other spheres, also, including particularly civil rights. Along with several colleagues (Lefferts Loetscher, David Willis, and Jim Andrews, then President McCord's administrative assistant), Ed DoweY (just returned from sabbatical in Europe) flew down to share in the last day of the march on Selma. When there was racial trouble in nearby Plainfield, Ed was more actively involved in organizing (along with Charles Willard) campus legal support for the defense of George Merritt. When African-American students at PTS began demanding appropriate attention to their concerns in the curriculum, Ed became personally involved with their leader, Bill Howard. Ed and Chuck Logan met with Bill Howard every Tuesday for lunch, to talk over black concerns and keep in touch with what was going on.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Tape 418 or side 2 of 417, 6-9, quotation, 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Tape of March 19, 1999, 3, 8.

Ed also remembers more typically academic activities. The new dean, James Nichols, "a good and a very tough dean," planned some revisions of the 01 courses. Ed comments on some of the ways he contributed.

One thing that Karlfried Froehlich and I did when we started CH01, was that we didn't divide the course according to our specialties. I did some patristics and medieval. Our feeling was that there is a level of general information with which every student needs to be equipped, and one doesn't need to be a specialist to teach it. Of course, Karlfried is a specialist in that whole field. I was not a church historian, so I spent a lot of nights in the library getting ready for those lectures.<sup>11</sup>

As a teacher Prof. Dowe was especially known for his course on Calvin's *Institutes* and generations of Princeton Seminary students remember this as one of his special gifts. However, he was also known for the way he taught other classes, and his passion for art and architecture in education. For example, his course on sin and evil was often illustrated by a trip to art galleries in New York City, places he had happily visited to select exactly the right paintings to convey something of the visual dimensions of his theological and religious subject. The class on Presbyterian history usually included a carefully conducted bus tour of the historic churches of Philadelphia; as his daughter Elizabeth and some of his students recognized, one of Dr. Dowe's avocations was tour guide. Glimpses of his humor and his love for architecture showed through in occasionally whimsical ways. While advising those planning to apply for travel and study grants, the professor told the story of his Guggenheim Fellowship. He had been informed that funding agencies like to be able to carve something out of a proposal before granting it, so he included in his fellowship application a budget item for visiting the baroque churches in southern Europe—to allow the Guggenheim Foundation to have the fun of cutting this out. But they didn't! So, as he sheepishly admitted, he got the whole grant and thoroughly enjoyed seeing all those baroque churches.

Among the many things which Ed Dowe did in service of the church, the best known is, of course, the chairing of the committee which wrote the *Confession of 1967*. Besides leading the committee, which he says included even personally making all the hotel reservations for each meeting, perhaps the most demanding part of the task was guiding the project through the church. Mrs. Margaret Adams told me that Ed managed those public presentations before General Assembly and other groups with an incredible poise and charm and skill. Though Ed himself never mentioned how per-

<sup>11</sup> Tape 414, April 22, 1994, 15, quotation, 7.



sonally dramatic and even dangerous these years were, Brian Armstrong, Ed's graduate assistant at the time, told me that he knows that Ed received death threats because of his work for the *Confession of 1967*.

In his later years Ed demonstrated an incredible grace as he dealt with Parkinson's disease. He never let it change him essentially. Several years ago he was invited to speak in the class entitled, "Presbyterian History and Theology" and Jim Moorhead tells this story. "I picked him up at his home and brought him to the classroom before the students arrived. After putting his notes on the podium, Ed slipped, fell, and hit his head. The few of us in the room rushed to his aid as he lay sprawled and dishevelled on the floor. Ed looked up and said, 'Don't worry, I do things like this every so often for sympathy!' Within a moment or so as the students were gathering, we helped him up, and he proceeded to give the lecture as if nothing had happened."<sup>12</sup>

Besides the joy of visual arts, Ed loved music—he played the piano—and literature. Let me close with a few words from his poetry, as he modified A. E. Housman's

"The Shropshire Lad."

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now  
Is hung with bloom along the bough,  
And stands about the woodland ride  
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,  
Not a one will come again.  
And take from seventy springs the lot,  
Zero spring is all I've got.

And since to look at things in bloom  
Zero spring is little room,  
About the woodlands I will go,  
And go and go and go and go.

Loveliest of years, the seventy-first,  
Gratis, given, free disbursed.  
Up, old lad: threescore eleven!  
Cherries may not bloom in heaven.

<sup>12</sup> E-mail note from Jim Moorhead, Oct. 22, 2003.

# Alan Preston Neely: A Tribute

by JAMES H. MOORHEAD

*James H. Moorhead, Mary McIntosh  
Bridge Professor of American Church History,  
delivered this memorial tribute before  
the Seminary faculty on November 5,  
2003.*

ALAN PRESTON NEELY was born in Arkansas on November 3, 1928 and died in Raleigh, North Carolina, on May 14, 2003 after a long battle with a respiratory ailment. He was the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Mission at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1988 until his retirement in 1996. He came to Princeton after serving as pastor in Texas, Virginia, and Colorado, as missionary in Colombia, and as Professor of Missiology at the Southeastern Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Professor Neely held two doctorates—one from Southwestern Theological Seminary and the other from the American University, Washington, D.C. Alan's inseparable partner in his various ministries was Virginia, his beloved wife of fifty-two years.

A committed Baptist, Neely knew at first hand the pain—personal and ecclesiastical—created by the battles within the Southern Baptist Convention and by the take-over of the denomination by fundamentalists. Alan resisted that coup as a perversion of a heritage that he loved deeply and was one of the founders of the Alliance of Baptists, a national organization of progressive Baptists. Yet despite events that would have left many embittered, Alan continued to exhibit an irenic and generous spirit that refused to be confined by ecclesiastical partisanship. At the heart of his ministry was a desire to build relationships among people of different cultures and traditions. Because his own devotion to Jesus Christ was so secure and his vision of God so great, Alan could dare to listen for the ways in which God might be active in the lives of others different from himself.

A major figure in the American Society of Missiology, he not only contributed frequently to the society's program and publications; he served as its president in 1988-89. Among his many publications in both English and Spanish, his most notable was, arguably, *Christian Mission: A Case Study Approach* published by Orbis Press in 1995. Another leading scholar of mission, asked to comment on Neely's work, notes: "Alan's outstanding characteristic as a missiologist was his concern to marry missiological theory with faithful practice. This is the context of the case-study method which was often a feature of his teaching (and the subject of a notable book). He would give a succinct but scholarly account of, let us say, Roberto de Nobili; but he would give it in such a way that those in the audience could not help escape

making decisions for themselves. They might have no previous knowledge of India or of the early seventeenth century, but Alan's exposition would unexpectedly illuminate something they did know about." So writes our friend and colleague, Andrew Walls.

At Princeton, Alan won students not only by dynamic teaching but also by the authenticity of his person and by the depth of his care. He counseled them, mentored them, and visited them in the hospital. Beneath the exterior of the scholar beat the heart of a loving pastor. As Professor Arun Jones, one of his former Ph.D. students, observes: "He was one of those rare people who respected you before he ever knew you, indeed before you had even uttered a word to him or he a word to you. He respected persons simply because they were human beings, created in the image of God. This became quickly apparent in his interactions with members of the grounds crew and cleaning crew at Princeton Seminary; he interacted with them with as much respect as with his fellow professors on the faculty."

Those same qualities won him the esteem of colleagues. In the midst of occasionally contentious faculty meetings, no one ever heard him voice a harsh or intemperate word. Whatever the provocation and despite his own deeply felt convictions, he always brought a judicious, healing, and good humored presence to our deliberations. Moreover, Alan reminded us of priorities. Gently but firmly he pricked the bubbles of our conceit whenever we, in this sometimes too serious and too self-absorbed place, were tempted to assume that the issues over which North American Protestants squabble are necessarily the matters of greatest world import. He consistently reminded us that neither the United States nor Princeton is the center of the universe. Perhaps we did not always want this reminder, but we needed it; and for it we are indebted to him.

During his memorial service last May, one of the speakers, referring to Alan's "retirement," prompted the congregation to laugh. The laughter was appropriate, for his last years in Raleigh were anything but idle. He not only continued to write and to teach occasionally at Duke Divinity School; he also immersed himself in community and church activities. He helped to found and was president of the Interfaith Alliance of Wake County and was also a founding board member of the North Carolina Martin Luther King Resource Center. The extent to which he had in retirement touched many lives was attested by the overflowing numbers in the large sanctuary of the Pullen Memorial Baptist Church where his memorial service was held. The diversity of those who came to grieve and to celebrate his life also spoke of the range of his influence: Black faces mingled with white, and women with crosses on gold chains about their necks sat next to men wearing yarmulkes or turbans.

As the respiratory disease with which he had long struggled gradually limited his physical horizons, Alan refused to allow his spiritual or intellectual vistas to contract. When pain denied him sleep, he would spend the wee hours of the night listening to the BBC news on the radio. "By dawn," he said with his typically irrepressible wit, "I'm the best informed person in Raleigh!" In his last months, Alan told his son, partly in jest and partly in earnest, I think—that he wished carved on his memorial stone, "He wasn't finished." Indeed he wasn't. But it is the comfort of the resurrection faith in which Alan died, that Another has promised him—and us—completion. In that hope, we express our gratitude for his life and ministry among us and our condolences to Virginia, their three children, and several grandchildren.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Felder, Cain Hope. *Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. Pp. 54. \$6.00.

Professor Felder's goal is clear and succinct. He aims to clarify for his contemporary readers how a biblical world that did not maintain "elaborate definitions of or theories about *race*," and a Bible whose narratives do not exhibit color bias against blacks could nonetheless combine to provide a foundation for post-Enlightenment, Eurocentric color prejudice. He operates with the thesis that there are two primary processes operating within the biblical corpus which provide fertile ground for racism. He defines these processes as *sacralization* and *secularization*.

Sacralization, a characteristic of the Hebrew narratives, "represents an attempt on the part of succeeding generations of one ethnic group to construe salvation history in terms distinctly favorable to itself as opposed to others." Felder offers four distinct examples: The Curse of Ham; Old Testament genealogies; the narrative about Miriam and Aaron's rejection of Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman; and the Doctrine of Election. The discussion about election is illustrative. Building from Horst Seebass' work on the Hebrew term for election in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Felder notes that the symbolism surrounding Israel's "election" by God was originally quite universal. That is to say, Israel, itself originally a "mixed multitude" of Semitic ethnicities, was not elected in exclusion of other peoples. It was instead a vessel appointed to the task of initiating inclusion for all people into God's salvation plan. Much later, towards the end of the seventh century BCE, Deuteronomistic editors of the Hebrew writings *sacralized* the notion of Israel's election by centering God's focus exclusively on the people who had by this time become ethnic Israel. It is in this way that "the concept of election becomes inextricably bound up with ethnic particularity." While certainly not itself a "racist" development, Felder's argument implies that this process of sacralization prepares the racist ground upon which some biblically oriented communities base their ethnic superiority.

Because of its universal emphasis on Gentile inclusion, the New Testament offers no grand strategies of sacralization. Secularization is its more characteristic trend. According to Felder, this secularization occurs because of the New Testament shift in emphasis from Jerusalem to Rome and Athens as "the new centers for God's redemptive activity." On the surface, this seems to be a simple shift in evangelical interests. Professor Felder argues, however,



that there is a greater significance: "the darker races outside the Roman orbit, by modern standards, seem circumstantially marginalized by New Testament authors." Once again, though the trend is not itself "racist", Felder's argument implies that the process of secularization prepares the ground upon which some contemporary faith and scholarly communities have based their prejudices about the ethnic inferiority of black peoples.

Felder's work is not, however, a negative one. His purpose in exposing these trends is the facilitation of conversation, not condemnation. He wants biblical scholarship to recognize and then share with faith communities the reasons why the biblical narratives can become racially problematic even though they were not themselves racially derogatory. Such recognition should then prompt the contemporary scholar "to search for more adequate modes of hermeneutics that can be used to demonstrate that the [biblical materials]—even as [they] stand locked into the socioreligious framework of the [Hebrew and] Greco-Roman world[s]—[are] relevant to blacks and other marginalized peoples."

Every biblical student interested in unearthing these "racializing" trends, understanding them, and ultimately moving beyond them will find Professor Felder's book extremely helpful. Even though its focus is on the particular problematic of black peoples, the reading counsel he gives will be immensely enlightening for readers in every marginalized community and powerfully instructive for readers in the communities that marginalize them.

Brian K. Blount  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Barth, Karl. *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*. Translated and annotated by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. Pp. 349. \$24.95.

This is the first English language translation of lectures on the theology of the Reformed Confessions Karl Barth gave in the summer of 1923 to theological students in Göttingen University. Barth had been named to a new chair as Professor of Reformed Theology, founded in 1921. Until then he had been a pastor in the Swiss village of Safenwil and had written a blockbuster commentary on Romans. But now he was in fresh waters as a theological professor. A renewal of interest in the Reformed theological heritage had begun near the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, paralleled by a similar movement of interest among Lutherans about their confessions of faith. Now Barth was to expound Reformed thought.

Barth had to get up to speed. When he was called to Göttingen, Barth said,

"It was not for me a matter of significance that I was Reformed. . . . I was not a confessional Reformed Christian." To bolster his understandings, Barth launched into lectures on Reformed topics for the next several semesters, culminating in the ones presented here and expertly translated by Darrell Guder, Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, and his wife, Judith J. Guder. Their untiring and eminently competent work has yielded a book with extensive notes, cross references, and indices that provide a wide open door for further study.

This is a wonderful resource for scholars and students of Barth. It shows Barth's early take on what is essential for Reformed faith as these theological themes are expressed in the rich heritage of Reformed confessions. In Part I, we see what Barth perceived the nature of "confessions" to be, their significance, and how they function. Part II focuses on "The Principle of Scripture and Its Grounds" where Barth considers the Reformed principle of Scripture. The third and largest segment is on "Reformed Doctrine as a Whole" where Barth examines the content of Reformed confessions in their varied forms. This is the rich venue where Barth's theological knowledge and creative powers coalesce for a thoroughly robust discussion of what Reformed Christians believe and confess.

Students of Barth profit here as do pastors, seminarians, and readers in the church. In days of "theological amnesia," a solid resource that concentrates on Reformed theological understanding is welcome on many counts. Time spent here will enhance both historical and theological understandings of the confessions that serve as road maps to Reformed faith. What is the nature of these confessions? Barth sees them the way the poet Schiller spoke of a bell—as, Barth says, "a *fading* bell stroke, a *falling*, *streaming* cascade, or, as we said, a *disappearing* shadow." Confessions are key to expressing our faith. Yet, for Reformed people, a confession has never been "the light, and it never wanted to be, because it knows that it cannot and may not be the light, but rather *testifies* to the light like the Baptist of the New Testament [see John 1:8], in whom the Reformed church has had of necessity to recognize its most profound and most authentic being, in this as well as in other aspects." In days when Confessions are used for a host of "purposes," Barth's words need to be heard.

This volume also conveys Barth's concern that confessions be related to the work of ministry. Preaching is central. In reflecting on Heinrich Bullinger's famous statement that "the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God," Barth offers important comments and a caveat: "'Outward preaching,' the churchly sermon, is the public and general announcement of

the Word of God recorded in Scripture from which no individual can without jeopardy withdraw himself by claiming direct spiritual communication. . . . One should not focus upon the proclaimer but upon what is being proclaimed. The minister may be 'evil and a sinner,' nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good." This is crucial counsel for any context, especially our own!

This splendid volume can add depth to our theology and ministries. Reformed Christians should welcome it and learn from it. Our confessional heritage here continues to speak, inform, and nourish.

Donald K. McKim  
Westminster John Knox Press  
Germantown, Tennessee

Aune, David E. *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament & Early Christian Literature & Rhetoric*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Pp. 595. \$49.95.

D. E. Aune, Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the University of Notre Dame, has distinguished himself among New Testament experts by his mastery of the Greek and Roman world in which "Christianity" evolved. In 1987 he published *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*. Now, Aune makes available a major reference work dedicated to the "literary and rhetorical dimensions of early Christian literature from its beginnings, about 50 C.E., through the mid-second century C.E."

Why is such a work necessary? Two reasons are obvious. First, the last fifty years has been distinguished by an unprecedented amount of early Jewish and Christian literature especially the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Codices. Second, beginning in the seventies a keen interest developed by New Testament scholars in the rhetoric of the Greek and Roman world beginning perhaps at Duke and the University of North Carolina with Professor George A. Kennedy. Thus, there is a need for a guide to the terms, texts, and perceptions.

The focus of Aune's book is "to synthesize and present the specific ways in which ancient and modern comparative literature, literary criticism, and rhetoric have been and could be applied to the literature of the New Testament." Aune is responsible for most of the entries, but eight of his former students have also contributed to the volume.

The entries, which begin with "Abbreviations" and ends with "Xenophon of Ephesus," are cross referenced. A very helpful and focused bibliography completes the volume. As one would expect, one can find

such entries as “anacolouthon,” “anonymity,” “chiasmus,” “diatribe,” “dispositio,” “elocution,” “encomium,” “enthymeme,” “fable,” “folklore,” “gnomologia,” “invention,” “isocoon,” “novel,” “orality,” “oxymoron,” “parable,” “poetry,” and “prooimion.” The entry on “4Ezra” is particularly insightful, discussing its relation to “2Bar” and “RevJn.” The dating of the “Book of Parables” is judicious, if cautious (“between the 1st cent. B.C.E. to the mid-1st cent. C.E.”) But he misses the recent more precise dating by Nickelsburg, Uhlig, Sacchi, and Charlesworth. I can attest to the industriousness and precision Aune has given to this work; it is evident in the final product and last year I saw him daily in the library of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem polishing the study.

There are places, of course, in which the book could have benefited by editing. Note these examples: “The great majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls texts are also anonymous” (p. 35) (surely, virtually all are anonymous); the Diatessaron “is a conflation of the four Gospels” (p. 127) (it includes non-canonical texts). If asterisks are to draw attention to separate entries, then Aune forgot to include “actio” and “memoria.”

Ministers, students, and scholars will find the entries informed and lucid. Particularly attractive are entries on such items as the following: “Apocalypse, literary genre of,” “Gospels, apocryphal.” Since most of the works in the New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are summarized, the work can serve as an introduction to this intriguing corpus. I recommend this book and am grateful to Aune for this helpful synthesis and survey.

James H. Charlesworth  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Leeming, H. and K. Leeming, eds. *Josephus' Jewish War and its Slavonic Version: A Synoptic Comparison*. Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und Urchristentums 46. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003. Pp. 718. \$274.00

This massive book presents two English translations of Josephus' Jewish War (written in the 70s of the first century CE). The reader is shown, in parallel columns, the English translation of the Slavonic Version and then of the Greek. An informative and informed introduction is provided by N. A. Meščerskij. For about one hundred years, some scholars have claimed that Slavonic Josephus preserves traditions that derive from Josephus and that they are essential in recasting Jesus' life and the origins of Christianity.

It seems clear that the omissions in Slavonic Josephus are due to the limited focus of the Russian translator. In considering the importance of the Slavonic



Version of Josephus one concern is paramount: Are the additions those by the author, Josephus, by Byzantine scholars, or by the Russian translator? Is there any evidence that this version of Josephus, in the additions, reflects the lost "histories" (or oratory compositions) of Jesus' time by Justus of Tiberias, son of Pistus (Agrippa II's secretary, Josephus' major literary adversary and one who had been an eyewitness of the War against Rome [66-73/4]), Nicolas of Damascus (the historian of Herod the Great [cf. esp. Jacoby, FGH F136]), or other lost early "histories"?

V. M. Istrin helped us comprehend such distinctions and opined that the additions are due either to the Slavonic translator or to Josephus. Istrin concluded that many of the additions derive from Josephus. This would be remarkable; and we would need to supplement the Greek recension which lies behind all influential English translations. N. A. Meščerskij, however, refutes Istrin's conclusion, and contends that all the additions were made by the Russian translator (p. 40). None of the insertions originate with Josephus; they "are all imbued with one and the same tendency, which is completely natural and appropriate for the Old Russian translator, but is in no way connected with Josephus' authorship" (p. 6 [his underlining]).

The Russian translation often faithfully represents a lost Greek manuscript. Hence, it can help us improve readings and correct errors in the Greek recension of which the earliest manuscript is from the tenth century (National Library, Paris MS 1425). The textual notes, on pp. 642-82, are of fundamental importance in preparing a new Greek edition of Josephus' War (the critical text was published by Niese in 1894).

Is Meščerskij correct in judging the additions in Slavonic Josephus to the Russian translator? Yes; they are unlike those of the early excerptors of Josephus (viz. Theophilus of Antioch, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Stephanus of Byzantium); the Russian translator has given us not only Josephus but his own creations.

Thus additions in Slavonic Josephus do not arise from a lost Greek (or Aramaic) manuscript and do not lead us back into the first century. They open to us the beginnings of the Russian nation in the eleventh century CE. The translator remains anonymous, but he was gifted and mastered Josephus' Greek. Meščerskij salutes the eleventh-century translator as the one who has given Russians "the pride of our literature" (p. 105). Here the gifted Russian is simply eulogizing Russian literature so he can get his work published by the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1958 when the 1936 Stalin Constitution was regnant. The careful scholar will unearth judgments about the "fantastic" and "tendentious" nature of the Old Russian translator.

Thus Slavonic Josephus, like the Josippon (Flusser) and even 5 Maccabees



(Reilly's 2002 thesis at Baylor), is not a neglected source for studying Early Judaism, Jesus, or the origins of Christianity (pace Berendts, Eisler, and Istrin). It is a monument to an early medieval linguistic genius who was enlivened by the literature that appeared in the late first century CE and the incomparable attractiveness of perhaps the last of the Hasmoneans, a priest, who provides us with an eyewitness account of the last years of ancient Israel. Indeed, Josephus bar Matthias' *History of the Jewish War* is "one of the outstanding works of world literature" (p. 21).

The first English Translation of Slavonic Josephus is based on a 16th-century manuscript (the Vilna Chronograph [p. 13]). I signal the major additions to Josephus' War in Greek that I have found:

- The content of Herod the Great's dream (p. 163)
- The coming of the meek Anointed One (p. 172)
- The report and words of the magi called "Persians" (pp. 179–81)
- The Latins' letter of commendation for Antipater (p. 219)
- The content of Herod's letter to Antipater (p. 221)
- The speech of Judas and Matthias (pp. 228–29)
- The adulation of John the Baptizer (pp. 248–49)
- Philip's dream and the Baptizer's imprisonment (p. 259)
- The summary of Jesus's life (p. 261–62)
- The miracles of the apostles (pp. 269–70)
- Jesus' death and the veil of the Temple (p. 487)

The additions allow us to hear, not the voice of early Jews, but a medieval Christian: "But now there is no one to ask and no one to console [us]" (p. 172); even when they were probably once indistinguishable. All the additions, in my judgment, are medieval and Christian. They contain Christian theology (the Messiah will "be born without a father" [p. 180]) and look like the interpolations, typically embellishing the record with dreams, speeches and letters. The summary of Jesus' life, in contrast to the Evangelists, reports that "the lawyers" gave 30 talents to Pilate, and that the latter tried to divert Jordan water to the Temple (p. 262). This topographical error could not have been committed by Josephus. Many of the additions are related to Jesus and his followers; they have the characteristics of the Christian interpolations in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.

The work is a monument to Meščerskij (1906–1987), who was convinced that Josephus' claim to have written the War in Aramaic is mere boasting. He was gifted, erudite, and obtained encyclopedic knowledge, despite the fact that he was exiled in a gulag for five years, perhaps because he was of princely stock and had been seen in a church during services. He also served me well,

when I edited the Slavonic pseudepigrapha. As I ponder the significance of Slavonic Josephus, I recall a conversation with one leading assistant in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (during a congress I helped organize on the Dead Sea Scrolls). When she learned that I was a biblical scholar, she lamented that she knew nothing about the stories behind the vast number of Rembrandts that hung majestically in rooms before us. Scholars are indebted to those who have labored over this work, a synoptic parallel between the Slavonic and Greek, in English translation. Finally, again I am impressed by the impact of early Jewish documents on the medieval mind of Christians and Jews (cf. also the Cairo Damascus document). The history of the Middle Ages is far richer than most scholars have indicated.

James H. Charlesworth  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Knitter, Paul F. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002. Pp. 271, \$25.00.

For once, the blurbs are not exaggerated. This is "a masterly summary of the main trends in Christian Theology of Religions," "written with admirable clarity and fairness," "a triumph of intellectual empathy," "a book to be read before all others in its field." Some readers may even find they cannot put it down. It will be for them a cliff-hanger like the old *Perils-of-Pauline* movie series in which each episode, except the last, ended with the heroine in mortal danger.

Such praise needs explanation. Knitter, acknowledging that he is trying to do the impossible, seeks to write with complete sympathy and persuasiveness about every position. That creates dangers for him but benefits both those who know the field and those who are new to theology of religions. The first group will be induced to think afresh about familiar themes, and the second, will find themselves led through an eye-opening survey suitable for college and seminary students as well as for the parish study groups whom Knitter says, with excessive modesty, are his primary audience.

Illustrations are in order. The author disrupts our usual ways of thinking by avoiding talk of exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist theologies of religion. Instead he speaks of "replacement," "fulfillment," and "mutuality" models. The change is mostly verbal, and yet intriguing. More substantively, he adds a fourth, "acceptance" model, newly developed in various ways, he says, by such authors as Mark Heim, Paul Griffiths, Francis Clooney (a Jesuit specialist on Hinduism) and the present reviewer. The classificatory scheme may be controversial, but each description of these very different

models is up-to-date and accurate (including footnotes and bibliographies) and each succeeds astonishingly well in sounding as if it were written by an adherent.

Replacement views, for example, are subdivided into "total" and "partial" varieties, and are rightly said to be strongest in our day among fundamentalist and evangelical Christians. For them, Christianity replaces all other religions: it is only through faith in Jesus Christ as witnessed to by scripture that human beings have access to revelation and salvation (the "total" view), or at least salvation (the "partial" view). Knitter, as part of his effort to put the best face on each model, provocatively chooses Karl Barth as the paragon expositor in his early writings of a total replacement position. By the time Knitter comes to his conclusion, even deep-dyed anti-Barthians will find themselves at least half-persuaded that there is no other way than this for Christians to take the bible and Jesus with proper seriousness in their relations with other faiths. "What the Replacement Model is calling for, really, is a kind of 'holy competition' between the many religions and their individual claims to the one-and-only, or the final, truth . . . You're not going to sell your product effectively if you present it as 'just as good' as the next guy's. . . . In such an open, honest, non-violent competition, Evangelicals are sure that Jesus will come out on top." Knitter is Roman Catholic, but in this section, he doesn't sound like one. He has done his home work well.

His mastery of the relevant materials is even greater when dealing with the fulfillment, mutuality and acceptance models. Protestants will be inclined to adopt a Roman Catholic fulfillment model after reading his exposition. Catholics as well as Protestants will find themselves nodding assent to the mutuality model even in its philosophical version as represented by John Hick. When Knitter then turns to the "ethical-practical" variant of this model (of which a previous book of his—which he never mentions!—is perhaps the best example), readers will think he has finally shown his hand. The succeeding chapters, however, will make them wonder if he does not think the acceptance model is better. They are left with no alternative except to make up their own minds.

The book ends with "An Inconclusive Conclusion" which, as I read it, is deliberately disappointing. It is confusingly eclectic, although my guess is that Paul Knitter's heart, and perhaps his head also, remains with what he calls "The Ethical-Practical Bridge" to the Mutuality Model. Moreover, his *Perils-of-Pauline* strategy moves readers forward so effectively that they come to the end without noticing his lack of attention to fundamentally important questions. What, after all, do the very different

things called “religions” have in common, what really is dialogue, and what about the quasi-religions which are secular faiths? By leaving such questions up for grabs, Paul Knitter has done what he set out to do: impel readers to think for themselves by keeping them on tenterhooks as to where he stands. Even the conclusion of this book is a success.

George Lindbeck (ret.)  
Yale University

Sifton, Elisabeth, *The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Time of Peace and War*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003. Pp. 367. \$26.95.

In this imaginatively written memoir, Elisabeth Sifton uses her father’s most famous prayer as a window through which she shows us the world as it was in the mid-20th century: both her private world and the world at large. Those of us who were students and friends of Reinhold Niebuhr rejoice over this book not least because we have for some time now felt increasing nostalgia for him and his leadership. For it was in the darkest hours of the last century that Reinhold Niebuhr and many of his colleagues mingled the idea of God with the ideals of liberalism.

One might correctly ask why one would yearn for the years in which there was unspeakable violence and injustice, when the world was overcome by the great depression, the holocaust and the second world war. Ironically—irony was one of Niebuhr’s favorite words—precisely the darkness in the world called for men like Niebuhr, and his brother Helmut Richard Niebuhr, and a score of others—more, I think, than is generally acknowledged—to speak out against social evils and for the common good. Niebuhr had always been committed to political action; as a young pastor he had spoken out against the exploitation of workers in Ford’s car factory. Although initially against America’s entry into the second world war, for decades he preached against the apathy and political indifference that many clergymen found comfortable, but that threatened freedom everywhere. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Paul Scherer, George Buttrick and other preachers in New York and elsewhere, at a time of great preaching as we have not experienced it since, were splendid exceptions. It was a time of many soloists, Reinhold Niebuhr in the forefront, some but not all of whom received the respectful attention of the national press, including, ironically, that of Henry Luce founder of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*.

In a writing style that reflects her father’s robust nature and her mother’s elegance, Sifton reclaims the true history of the “Serenity Prayer,” a prayer composed by her father in their summer home in Heath, Massachusetts and

eventually known throughout the world. She rescues it from claims of false authorship and around and through it, she breathes life into a veritable crowd of fascinating intellectuals and activists who were friends of her parents. That circle was a wonderful mix of Christians and Jews: clergymen like Bishop Will Scarlett; philosophers and theologians, like Paul Tillich, whom Niebuhr and others rescued when he was forced to leave Nazi Germany; Supreme Court jurists like Felix Frankfurter (his quotation from Schiller's poetry is a nice touch); secular historians like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and finally rabbi intellectuals like Abraham Heschel. Sifton's memoir includes vivid descriptions of summers in Heath shared always by her older brother Christopher, and winters in New York where her father taught at Union Theological Seminary and where her beautiful, gifted mother taught at Barnard College. Ursula Niebuhr befriended W. H. Auden, the great poet who is said to have influenced Tillich's "The Courage to Be" via his poem "The Age of Anxiety." Certainly the two had conversations about what was largely considered the predominant neurosis of the post-war world. Wherever one turned in that world, dark though it was, one encountered genius and creativity in nearly every field: not only philosophy and theology but in music, painting, sculpture, and architecture. There was a plethora of riches for intellectual inquiry and inspiration.

One might say that the courage which Reinhold Niebuhr demonstrated in speaking out against injustice of all kinds was contagious and, fortunately for the world, effective. We need such courage today, we need to speak out against an administration that has gone to war for the wrong reasons while unemployment and homelessness have reached unacceptable levels. The voices of Niebuhr's students and followers are harder to hear. The late Robert McAfee Brown is sorely missed, and William Sloane Coffin, Jr. his friend and companion on virtually all anti-war demonstrations is ailing. It seems to this writer that the soloists have gradually been replaced by a chorus which has not yet received the wide attention its members deserve. Sifton's splendid, well researched book thus may become a means whereby more of us join that chorus and continue the work in which her father excelled.

Marion Hausner Pauck  
Mountain View, California

Kelly, Geoffrey B. and Nelson, F. Burton, *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. 327. \$25.00.

Among the many books that have been written about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and martyr of the resistance to Hitler, this one holds



a special place. It is not a theological or philosophical treatise, but a study of the man, of his pastorate, of his teaching and preaching, of his engagement in the social struggle, and above all, of his spirituality. Geoffrey Kelly and Burton Nelson are life-long scholars and followers of the Lutheran Bonhoeffer. Kelly, a Roman Catholic at LaSalle University, is one of the founders and guides of the International Bonhoeffer Society. Nelson, of the Evangelical Covenant Church's North Park Seminary, has explored every nook and cranny of Bonhoeffer's life and times. Both have published books of their own about his theology. They are masters of Bonhoeffer's ideas. Here it is the person who interests them. They introduce us to the spirituality of their teacher and their friend.

After a brief description of his life, "a chapter from the modern acts of the apostles" they call it, the authors plunge more deeply into each of that life's dimensions. First, they describe Bonhoeffer's Christocentric spirituality as expressed in action for justice, in the interpretation of Scripture, in discipleship and in faithful confession, drawing primarily on his ministry in Germany as a committed yet critical servant of the Confessing Church in its resistance to "German Christianity" and to Nazi ideology and power. Then they probe his solidarity with the poor and the oppressed and his pacifist witness, chastened but not removed by his part in the plot on Hitler's life. Here they draw implications for Christian witness today amid struggles for liberation, wars and the search for a just peace in the Middle East and elsewhere. Finally, they explore Bonhoeffer's theology and practice of conformity with the life, compassion, suffering and death of Christ, toward which he directed the church and his own discipleship. The book concludes with selected resources from his sermons, poems and prayers that deepen the reader's understanding of that practical theology, in the context of the faith, hope and love that inspired it.

This is a meditative rather than a critical study. The discussion questions on each chapter at the end reinforce this quality. The reader is invited to absorb Bonhoeffer's life and thought, to be questioned and inspired by it, and to search one's own life in the light of it. In this spirit the book should be read and studied, in church and Christian groups everywhere looking for insight and guidance. Bonhoeffer, a follower of Christ deeply immersed in the tragic crisis of his own German time and place, is an inspiration and a guide to people in quite different worlds today just because that Christocentric immersion was so concrete, so complete, and therefore so universal. We learn from him in ever new and surprising ways, who Christ is for our lives and for our societies.

Kelly and Nelson lead us into this learning and for this leadership we should be grateful. But they would not intend that we should rest with their

interpretations. The book is designed to lead us to our own encounter with Bonhoeffer himself, a more exciting, controversial and challenging experience than the authors sometimes suggest. Was he really a liberation theologian? Was he a basically pacifist at heart? How far did he as a prophet transcend his Prussian aristocratic heritage? How did discipleship relate to responsibility in his moral leadership? These and many other questions wait like rough seas outside the bay into which the authors invite us to plunge. This book is a good guide as we start swimming.

Charles C. West  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Purves, Andrew. *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001. Pp. 160. \$17.95.

*Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* is a refreshing and challenging admonition to re-embed pastoral ministry in historic Christian doctrine through exposition of classical practical theological texts. Purves, an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacrament (PCUSA) and Professor of Pastoral Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, begins with a brief commentary on the field of pastoral theology (and its related cognate pastoral care) as it developed throughout the twentieth century. In particular, he criticizes the segregation of pastoral ministry from theology and the domination of the psychological paradigm, while still acknowledging the positive gains associated with interdisciplinary dialogue. Purves's modest response to this marginalization of doctrine within pastoral care is a re-reading of five classical pastoral texts spanning both time, the fourth through seventeenth centuries, and theological orientation, Greek, Latin, Reformation, and Puritan: "In Defense of His Flight to Pontus" (Gregory of Nazianzus); *Six Books on the Priesthood* (John Chrysostom); *Pastoral Care* (Pope Gregory the Great); *On the True Pastoral Care* (Martin Bucer); and, *The Reformed Pastor* (Richard Baxter).

Each chapter of the book is dedicated to analysis of one text, beginning with a succinct introduction to the particular author and the significant themes of his theology in general. Purves highlights specific challenges posed to pastoral theology today, as well as any untenable aspects of the text under examination. Perhaps most valuable is his exposition of Bucer's *On the True Pastoral Care*, which has yet to be translated into English. As noted by Purves, though central to Reformation pastoral practice, this text has remained in obscurity. Bucer's conceptualization of pastoral ministry around the themes of reconciliation, evangelism, and discipline potentially provoke critical re-engagement with core concerns of our Reformed heritage.

Throughout the book, Purves' goal is not repristination of these pastoral treatises but rather a "profound reappraisal of the core working assumptions in pastoral theology" through critical conversation with ancient texts. Therefore he concludes with themes from the five classical pastoral texts that beg for further exploration by contemporary pastoral theologians: (1) Pastoral theology and pastoral care are explicitly confessional in content; (2) Pastoral theology is a discipline, and pastoral care is a practice, deeply rooted at all points in the study of the Bible; (3) Ministry is a high calling to a holy office; (4) Pastoral work demands taking heed of oneself to the end that one is theologically, spiritually, and ethically a mature person; (5) God will hold pastors accountable for the exercise of the pastoral office and the care of God's people; (6) Pastoral care is the "art of arts"; (7) Pastoral ministry is situational and contextual; and, (8) Pastors deeply committed to the church wrote the classic texts, thus the church and academy need to be re-connected.

Overall, Purves' work echoes the current internal criticisms of the field of practical theology as it developed in the modern period, e.g., the loss of theological identity, the over-focus on method as opposed to content, and the relegation of practical studies to mere craftsmanship. In regard to the first criticism, Purves' re-reading of classical practical texts suggests the need for a central theological metaphor that holds together the manifold pastoral tasks.

In regard to the second criticism, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* focuses exclusively on the content of practical theology. For those who understand practical theology as inherently interdisciplinary, the book will seem under-developed on this point. It also potentially reduces pastoral theology to applied dogmatics. Therefore Purves' above-mentioned eight themes ought to be interpreted as possible theological norms for the discipline requiring further exploration through interdisciplinary dialogue.

Purves moves beyond the third criticism of practical theology in his suggestion that pastoral work is an "aesthetic discipline" requiring a certain "cast of mind," i.e., a mind molded by the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ. He highlights, perhaps unwittingly, the close connection between pastoral ministry and practical reason, a common motif within recent international discussions of practical theology. Here again Purves challenges practical theologians toward establishing a biblically- and confessionally-based definition of practical reason and wisdom.

Overall, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* presents an ennobling view of the pastoral office, potentially inspiring the spiritual, theological, and moral formation of the reader and the development of ministerial norms

grounded in core theological doctrines. A valuable read for students, pastors, and theologians who desire to reconnect the practice and theory of the cure of souls.

Theresa F. Latini  
Princeton Theological Seminary

La Due, William J. *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2003. Pp. 212. \$20.00.

La Due's project is quite ambitious. In this volume of modest length, the Roman Catholic scholar presents an historic and systematic summary of trinitology. *The Trinity Guide* is essentially a collection of different understandings of the Christian doctrine of God from basic Biblical interpretations to the earliest ecclesial doctrinal formations, to the medieval theological sparring sessions, to more modern re-interpretations. All the major players are here: La Due's choice of theologians is impressively inclusive, as are his efforts to show the historic interaction of their thoughts. As such, La Due's *Guide* serves as a more than adequate compendium to introduce the novice theologian to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Following a popular methodology, the book begins with a survey of biblical warrant. However, La Due does not merely present pertinent passages from the Old and New Testament. Rather, he presents the thoughts of influential Biblical scholars in their efforts to describe Scriptural understandings of Divine ontology. These historical-critical interpretations of Biblical narrative and terminology are helpful, but it ought to be noted that they are all contemporary interpretations.

Next, La Due looks at the formulation of orthodoxy. Several important Ante-Nicene Fathers, most notably Origen and Tertullian, are summarized in relation to their trinitology, in order to show the background to the Council of Nicaea in 325. La Due covers the developments between Nicaea and Chalcedon (451) by way of delineating the contributions of Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers from the Greek-speaking church, Augustine and Hilary from the Latin.

Augustine is properly emphasized, especially his understanding of divine "personhood." The Cappadocians, notably Gregory of Nyssa, are unfortunately underemphasized. Overall, the doctrinal formulation in the first five centuries of Christianity is painted in very broad strokes, but the picture is likely of sufficient clarity for a basic introduction. La Due's elementary intermingling of christology and trinitology in his presentation is actually astute; it was not until the full divinity of Christ was



affirmed that the Later Fathers were ready to turn to working out the metaphysics of the Trinity.

In his summarization of Post-Chalcedonic and Medieval theology, La Due pays a great deal of attention to the split between the East and West. La Due similarly often seems to present an apologetic for the *filioque*. Perhaps here La Due's Roman Catholic stripes are shown; the affirmations of creeds and especially ecumenical councils are held in the highest regard. Anselm and Richard of St. Victor are only very briefly mentioned, and, unfortunately, the continued development of essential ideas—*perichoresis* or *circumincessio*, the doctrines of *opera trinitatis ad extra* and appropriation—are seemingly ignored.

La Due, however, rightly pays a great deal of attention to the trinitology of Thomas Aquinas, including his conception of such notions as eternal procession and spiration vs. temporal missions. The great doctor of the church is presented as further spelling out orthodoxy, continuing the work that Augustine began. La Due also rightly downplays development in the doctrine during the Reformation, and credits the Enlightenment as the next great era of development in trinitology, though the influence of Hegel upon the doctrine is barely noted.

The last half of the book is devoted to theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Schleiermacher, von Harnack, Barth, Rahner, Moltmann, La Cugna and Elizabeth Johnson are among the many figures examined. As mentioned, throughout the book, the inclusion of figures is impressive. And perhaps too ambitious. Most of the theological summaries are a bit oversimplified, and the at-times redundant style indicates an uncritical and bare recapitulation of theologians' works. Throughout the *Guide*, there is little if any analysis or evaluation of all the different theological assertions; indeed the reader is left wondering as to the author's own position.

To be fair, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity* is probably not meant to be a scholarly treatise on trinitology. It is meant to be a very basic introduction of the terms, figures, thoughts, and movements in the history of the doctrine, and is written in a very accessible manner, usually with terminology that is suitable for the novice. The short summaries of different theologians, along with the summaries at the end of each chapter, make the book a good reference for students. Overall, the *Guide* is a sufficient introduction to the doctrine that forms the bedrock of orthodox Christianity—it is unlikely that two-hundred pages could more adequately cover such a monumental topic in a manner understandable to the beginning or lay theologian.

Michael D. Langford  
Princeton Theological Seminary



Anderson, Ray S. *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001. Pp. 342. \$25.00.

*The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* is a masterful collection of essays addressing the core concerns of the discipline of practical theology as it has evolved within the past three decades. In this book, pastor-theologian Ray Anderson develops a critical-missional-practical theology in dialogue with (a) the Reformation tradition, particularly as expressed by Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and T.F. Torrance, (b) the concerns of liberation theology, and (c) leading practical theologians, such as Don Browning, James Fowler, and Gerben Heitink.

The book contains three sections: the shape of practical theology; the praxis of practical theology; and, practical pastoral theology. In part one, Anderson begins with a brief overview of the field of practical theology and its development, beginning with Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century up to the present. He then sets forth his definition and theory of practical theology from both a Trinitarian and Christocentric perspective. Part Two is a compilation of essays in which Anderson describes and demonstrates practical theological reflection as the creative interplay between the word of Christ (in Scripture) and the work of Christ (in and through the Church). Here he establishes the ecclesial core of practical theology. In part three, Anderson utilizes his model of practical theology to address current ministerial questions and challenges e.g., the church's flight from the city, homosexuality, forgiveness, clergy burnout, and changes in family structure in our postmodern context.

Anderson defines practical theology as a "dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity, carried out in light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge." Its purpose is to facilitate the church's participation in Christ's mission to the world. Thus practical theology is fundamentally a discipline for the world. It summons the church back to its "missionary roots" in accordance with the divine modality, i.e., the missions of the Triune God. Herein lies the uniqueness of Anderson's model of practical theology: he posits the public role of practical theology as predominantly missional, rather than apologetic.

Perhaps the most innovative and potentially seminal aspect of the book is Anderson's confessional hermeneutic, "Christopraxis," which is a modification of Browning's five-tiered practical reason. Similar to Browning, Anderson claims that practical theological reflection begins when human experience challenges, or conflicts with, the Christian tradition. Yet, for Anderson, this is not merely "human experience"; seen through the eyes of faith, it is "Christopraxis," the

hidden but emerging work of the Risen and Living Lord Jesus Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In these situations, the minister's role is to help the church answer the questions, "What is Jesus doing in this situation?" and "How can we participate in his mission?" The answer emerges from creative tension between the word of Christ (as witnessed to in Scripture) and the work of the Risen Christ (as witnessed in human life), or between the Christ of the first century and the Christ of the last century. In other words, the hermeneutical criterion for interpreting the Word of God in relationship to the work of God in the praxis of ministry is the Resurrected One whose own praxis is the humanization of humanity to be fully actualized in eternity.

In his chapter "The Concept of Neighbor in the Ethics of Karl Barth," Anderson develops Christopraxis as a form of Christian social ethics based upon Barth's theological anthropology. Since the Incarnate Word exists for and with others historically and ontologically, and since the basic form of humanity is co-humanity, the neighbor, to whom we are bound, becomes the ethical criterion. Here and elsewhere in the book, Anderson implicitly refutes the common misperception (at least among certain leading practical theologians), that serious engagement with Barth constricts one to the older model of applied dogmatics.

Finally, a predominant thread woven throughout the book is Anderson's critique of the current paradigm in theological education, i.e., the segregation of theology from the praxis of ministry, the triumph of orthodoxy over orthopraxy, and the reduction of practical theology to applied dogmatics, on the one hand, or hermeneutics, on the other. In his bold conclusion, "Memo to Theological Educators," Anderson's critique of theological education reaches its pinnacle in the form of personal address to his colleagues near and far. In response to the "captivity of the church's theological agenda by the guild of so-called professional scholars in academic theological education," he proposes significant changes in the four-fold pattern of theological education, including (1) a praxis-based curriculum; (2) parity between missional (i.e., practical) theology and systematic theology; and, (3) structuring the curriculum around vocational (ministerial) competencies.

Undoubtedly some readers will find Anderson's critique too harsh and perhaps offensive, while others will respond with a passionate "Amen!" In either case, *The Shape of Practical Theology* merits the serious attention of both practical theologians interested in the continuing evolution of their discipline and ministers of the Gospel seeking to sharpen their skills in discerning the praxis of God at work in concrete situations of ministry.

Theresa F. Latini  
Princeton Theological Seminary

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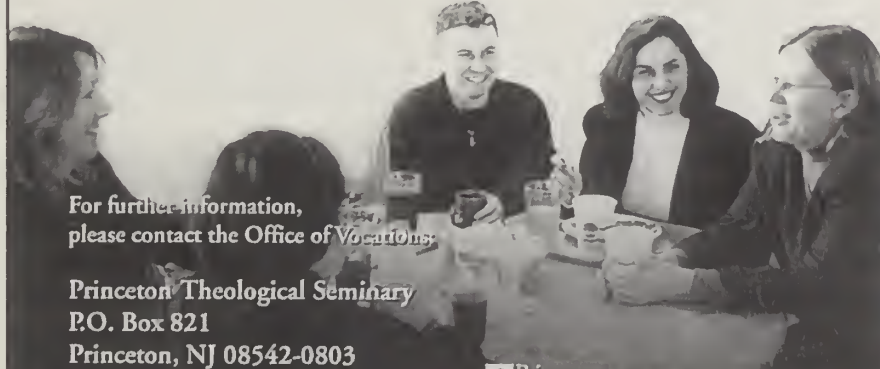
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Mohr Siebeck

P.O. Box 2040

D-72010 Tübingen

Fax +49 / 7071 / 51104

e-mail: [info@mohr.de](mailto:info@mohr.de)

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